

Socialist Review

of Aotearoa/New Zealand

For a socialist and democratic alternative

Issue 4 Spring 2000 \$1

Where is NZ going?

We take an in depth look at just *Where is NZ going?* p.3, plus
A return to "Old" Labour? p.10 *Big Money and the Nats* p.13 and the need for
Building a new Education Campaign p.14

Also in this issue:

**Learning from Seattle, new Red Words section, the Fiji
coup, Jock Barnes, Oscar Wilde, Rosa Luxemburg ++ more**

Letters to the editor...

Dear Socialist Review,

I was happy to see the latest edition of the magazine. It is great to see another take on politics, given the increasing dominance of right wing ideas. From environmental issues to international relations, free market arguments are more dominant than they have ever been. The results of this are pretty clear – the rich get richer, and third world countries slide into chaos.

Free marketeers make no apologies for this. The rich are being rewarded for their skills, and though those on top of the pile are richer than ever, everyone is better off. But the fact that the average person may be spending more on consumer goods doesn't mean that they are better off. Often they have no alternative but to spend more if they want to keep their jobs. Everyone is working much harder and longer than in the past, so household appliances like reliable washing machines, and reliable motor cars become essential ways of saving time from working at home. Once upon a time these household appliances were luxuries for the average working family, but just try holding down a job and doing without them now!

It's the same with education. Getting a degree used to be a ticket to a well paid job, it used to be a luxury. More and more nowadays, you need one just to get by, and then you need the job just to pay off the debt on the student loans. Most media won't talk about these things. It's good to see a magazine that does.

Thanks,

Andrew Tait

Queensland, Australia

Socialist Review welcomes your letters:
Please send to either of the addresses below



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**Showdown
in Seattle**

Socialist Review is selling copies of the great documentary video
Showdown in Seattle.

It is a brilliant documentary that everyone on the left should see. The price is \$8 to cover our costs. If you are outside Dunedin then please add \$4 to cover postage.

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Where is NZ going?

The sixties and
seventies – from
Peace and Love to
*Class War and
Revolution*

From the late 1960s until the early-mid seventies there was a major upturn in working class struggles. This period was marked by a high level of confidence amongst workers and the oppressed to fight for better conditions. Struggles that began with simple economic demands were often transformed into much more generalised struggles for political change. This period saw the revolutionary upheaval in France during May 1968, the "Long Hot Autumn" of strikes in Italy, the wave of strikes in Britain which culminated in the downfall of the Conservative Government in 1974, and the Portuguese revolution of 1974-5.

It was also a period in which social movements of the oppressed – blacks, gays and lesbians, women – emerged as genuinely mass activist movements committed to liberation from oppression achieved through revolutionary change. And, of course, there was the tremendous influence of the worldwide protest movement against US intervention in Vietnam.

Just what do the immense changes of the past few years mean? Will Labour and the Alliance (or the Greens for that matter) really make things better?

Why did the unions completely fail to do anything to resist Rogernomics or the Contracts Act?

To answer these questions we need to look back a little into history – to the changes in the international economy and the level of working class resistance and union organisation over the last 30 or so years.

In this special editorial, we examine why these changes took place, why fightbacks seem to be at such a low level right now, and why, despite all this, the need for a real alternative has never been stronger.

What all these struggles highlighted, apart from the fact that the working class had been far from successfully "bought off" by capitalism during the long boom of the 1950s and '60s, was the need for genuine workers' parties built in the democratic, international socialist tradition. The Stalinist parties (especially the French Communist Party) and the social democratic leaders played a key role in demobilising the mass movements of the time.

These patterns also played themselves out in New Zealand. The lack of industrial action for much of the boom years ended abruptly with the upsurge in strike activity which started with the reaction to the Arbitration Court's nil General Wage Order in 1968. It continued through the militant strike waves of the early 1970s, and culminated in the nationwide union campaign against the National Government's attempted freeze on wages in 1976-77.

Social movements protesting against New Zealand's involvement in the Vietnam War, racism within New Zealand and in South Africa, and women's oppression grew rapidly.

Around the world, and here in New Zealand, a new generation absorbed the belief that people could collectively change the world and change it for the better.



A little history... Mario Savio (with megaphone) addresses students occupying Sproul Hall at the Berkeley campus in 1964. The Berkeley free speech movement marked the beginning of mass student unrest in the United States. The sixties witnessed extremely important struggles – not just by students, but workers and other oppressed groups too – all around the world.

The eighties – collapse of the Long Boom, rise of the New Right

The world recession in 1974 marks a crucial turning point in economic history. It separates a period of unprecedented growth and prosperity (1945-1973) from one of stagnation, declining real incomes and rising unemployment (1974 to the present).

There was a deepening of the world economic crisis and a dramatic shift to the right in most of the advanced industrialised countries during the 1980s. Rising unemployment weakened the workers' movement. Matching this decline was an increase in employer militancy and business political activism.

By the late eighties these two factors, along with the election of the radical New Right Fourth Labour Government in 1984 had created an extremely right wing political climate in New Zealand.

It is often difficult now to recall just how dominant the New Right's ideas were in the mid to late eighties. It wasn't just that those struggles which did break out were usually defensive in nature (defending existing pay and conditions rather than demanding better ones), but that the whole ideological climate was dominated by "Rogernomics" and neoliberalism (the economic theories associated with the New Right) in general. Between 1984-87 whole sections of the New Zealand working class swallowed the myths of the New Right, that "NZ had to compete internationally", and that "there is no alternative."

The early nineties – fall of the Wall, revival of struggle

The collapse of Stalinism from 1989-91 had an immense political impact in the West. Many interpreted it as heralding the ultimate demise of socialism. But Stalinism has nothing in common with genuine

democratic socialism of the kind envisaged by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky.

During the early 1990s the political climate became much more conducive to building fightbacks. Internationally, there was mass political opposition to the Gulf War in 1991, a revolt against the Poll Tax in Britain and the Los Angeles uprising of 1992, general strikes throughout Europe the most notable being the 10 million strong strike against the right wing Berlusconi Government in Italy, and the French mass strikes of December 1995.

In New Zealand, there was opposition to the Gulf War, a major revival in struggle on the campuses, the biggest wave of Māori protests since the late sixties and early seventies, mass working class opposition to the Contracts Act in 1991, and the successful struggle by the Seafarers to maintain their union in 1994. The mood of anger that had been building amongst workers, students and the oppressed in response to the ruling class offensive from 1984 onwards, underpinned this revival in struggle.

This revival in the level of struggle created a political climate in which it became much easier to win people to revolutionary socialist ideas. For example, in New Zealand the International Socialist Organisation was established in Dunedin at the beginning of 1993 and by early 1994 had grown to a national membership of 50.

The mid 1990s

The rise of NZ First during 1996 both contributed to, and in turn was fuelled by, a significant shift in political mood. Winston Peters scapegoated Asian immigrants to shift the blame for the effects of the ruling class offensive (rising unemployment, wage cuts, the health crisis, market rents in state housing, and so forth) away from the bosses and the pro business New Right policies of Labour and National. At the same time, the immigration issue was used to win support from Māori who, more than any other group, were hit hardest

by the ruling class offensive.

The formation of a coalition between NZ First and National following the first MMP election in 1996 had complex and differing effects on the political mood of workers, students and Māori. At the time, we observed that "This much is clear, the anger [amongst workers, students, Māori] remains but it is contained by a greater sense of demoralisation than prevailed during the period from 1990-1995."

Looking back, it is now possible to see that the revival of struggle, both within New Zealand and internationally, that took place from 1989 to 1995, started to run out of steam during the second half of the 1990s.

In New Zealand during the mid to late 1990s, many pinned their hopes for change on MMP, the Alliance and increasingly Labour. While we argued that MMP and reformist parties like Labour and the Alliance would not bring about real change, many workers, students and Māori did (or at least hoped that they would).

Following the 1996 election and the formation of the first coalition government under MMP, they were betrayed by NZ First, which campaigned with a clear anti National rhetoric, and were angry that National continued to behave in power as if nothing had changed.

But this anger did not, unfortunately, lead to a revival of working class struggle. Rather, workers and the oppressed turned to Labour as the only avenue for change that they saw open to them. The tiny socialist organisations that existed at the time were far too small to offer an alternative.

The 1999 election and after – where to from here?

The defeat of National and ACT at the last election,

despite the massive level of business financial backing for these parties, was very significant (See article on page 13). It reflected a political mood within the working class and sections of the urban middle class that had become much more conscious of, and strongly opposed to, the pro business ideology and policies of the New Right. But this political mood was, at the same time, contained by a strong sense of demoralisation, passivity and powerlessness.

Why has this been the case? To be honest, we don't know for sure. We would have a much clearer understanding of the processes involved if the International Socialists were a much larger organisation with 500-600 members spanning a broad range of different working class occupations. But we are not in that position, and therefore we are reliant on much cruder sources of information – such as official statistics.

Reality is not always pleasant – but we must face it

And what the official statistics show very clearly is that the rich in this country have never been better off, that income inequality has increased dramatically, and that, in fact, the majority of New Zealanders are on lower real after tax incomes now than they were in 1980!

They also paint a rather bleak picture of the current state of working class organisation and industrial struggle. In the wake of the Employment Contracts Act, which was one of the most significant defeats ever experienced by the union movement in this country, union membership has fallen by more than half.

Strike activity, however it is measured, has been lower in recent years than at any time during the post war era. In 1997, 7,646 workers were involved in strikes (the smallest number since the 1930s), in 1998, 15,205,

The greatest events of the 1960s' upturn took place in France during May 1968. Inspired by student protests and occupations, millions of workers took part in the largest general strike in history – seizing control of their factories and coming close to taking real power for themselves.



and in 1999, 10,747. These figures compare to a range of between 51,962 and 16,042 for the years from 1990 to 1996 inclusive. (*Key Statistics*, June 2000, p.41)

What these figures show is that there has been downturn in industrial struggle from 1997 to the present (June 2000).

Does this mean that there is no possibility of major fightbacks in the near future?

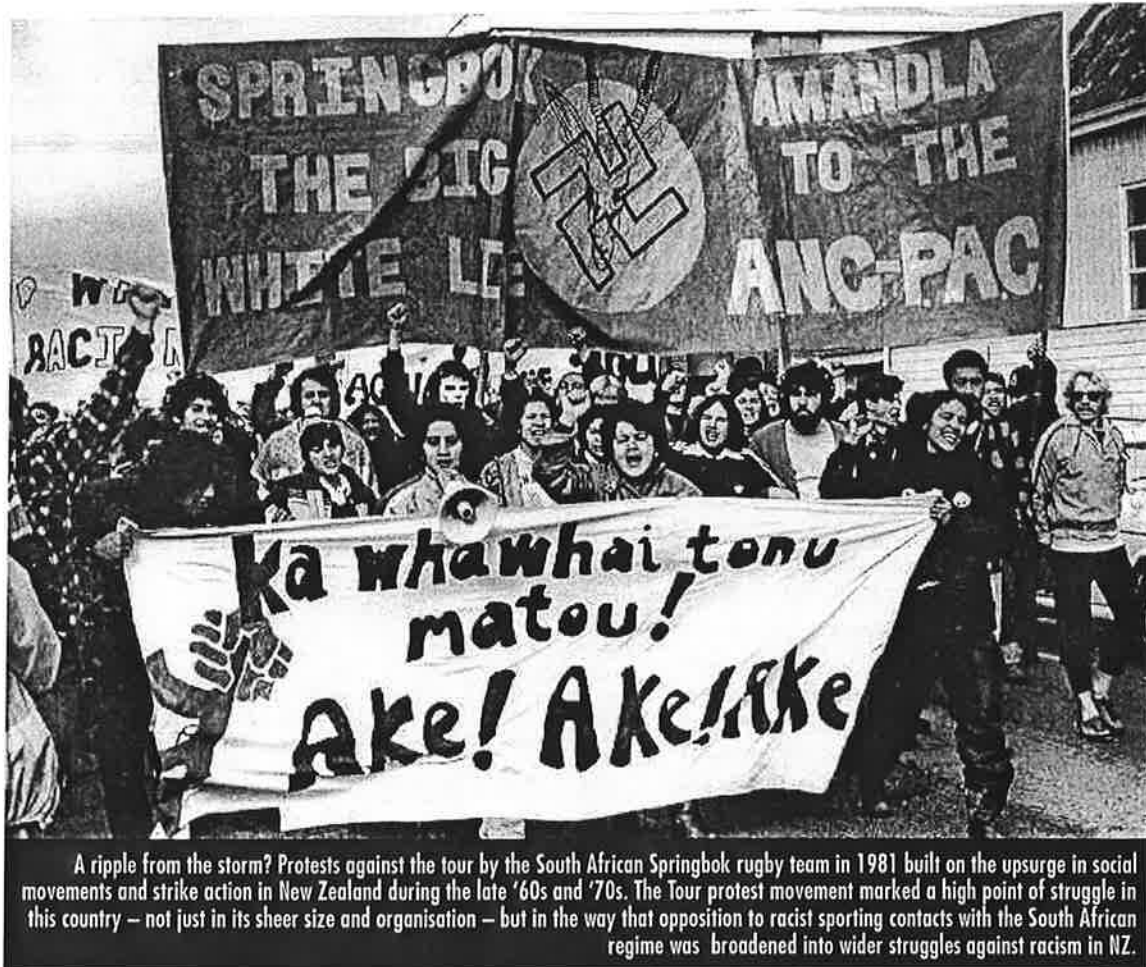
What marks the current period is the volatility that affects everyone from the ruling class down. On the one side, the political mood of workers, students, Māori and the oppressed is characterised by a deep level of anger and frustration over the pro business New Right policies of the past 16 years.

At the moment this sense of anger and frustration is being contained by two key influences. First, the widespread demoralisation of workers in those sectors which have become effectively de-unionised since 1991. It is much harder to fight if you no longer have the organisational means of doing so! Second, by the general illusions that are held in reformism – the idea that change can only come through parliament. It is going to take a little while longer for workers, students and the oppressed to appreciate that change will only come if they are prepared to fight for it, regardless of which party holds power in parliament.

On the other side, business has been fighting tooth and nail to hold on to all the major gains that it has received since 1984 – major tax cuts on profits and high incomes, the Employment Contracts Act, the cutting back of ACC, benefit cuts for the poor, and so on.

As socialists, we must defend the current government against these attacks from the right, while simultaneously criticising it from the left.

For example, we support some elements of the Employment Relations Bill: improved right of access to



A ripple from the storm? Protests against the tour by the South African Springbok rugby team in 1981 built on the upsurge in social movements and strike action in New Zealand during the late '60s and '70s. The Tour protest movement marked a high point of struggle in this country – not just in its sheer size and organisation – but in the way that opposition to racist sporting contacts with the South African regime was broadened into wider struggles against racism in NZ.

workplaces for union representatives; provision for paid time off for workers to attend union meetings; better provision for collective bargaining; legalising strike action in support of multi employer and multi union agreements.

But we argue that it does not go anywhere near far enough. Indeed, with respect to the right to strike provisions of the ERB it is in some ways even worse than the Employment Contracts Act (by requiring a 40 day negotiation period following the expiration of a collective contract).

During the past decade what socialists call "the balance of class forces" have swung very rapidly from a raised level of struggle to a lower level. Given the overall volatility of the current period – economically, socially and politically – it is likely to shift again towards a revival of working class struggle.

In the short term we have to face facts – working class struggle, at least industrially, has reached a low ebb. But we also have to constantly argue and fight for real change – not just the cosmetic tinkering of the present government.

And that means, above all else, that we need to continue to engage in the "battle of ideas" – we need to show clearly and convincingly what is wrong with the world, why it is this way, how we can change it, what the only realistic alternative is. The Alliance, Greens and Labour have no convincing answers, the International Socialists do. ■

CRITICAL NOTES

Fiji coup

The Fiji Coup which began on May 20th, like the first led by army boss Sitiveni Rabuka in 1987, is not simply about race. The New Zealand media has represented the coup as centrally involving ethnic conflict between indigenous Fijians and Indian Fijians. What they don't tell us is that the ruling class in Fiji, of which the Great Council of Chiefs is an integral part, hated the Labour dominated Coalition Government led by Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudry. It cut power bills, reduced GST on food, and was planning a tax increase for the rich.

The coup is fundamentally about capitalism, colonisation, class and corruption in which, above all else, racism has been used by local and international capitalists to divide and rule the Fijian working class. As Gordon Campbell points out, "*Indian dominated government*", "*Fiji for Fijians*." – These have always been the phoney war cries of Fijian politics that have been used, in 1987 and again now, to whip up racial passions as a smokescreen, while the old business and political elites make their moves behind the scenes to retake power." (*Listener*, June 3)

In order to understand Fijian politics it is necessary to understand the role that Indian indentured labour played in the process of colonisation. As David

Robie observes, "Events in New Zealand had a profound effect on the way Fiji was administered as a crown colony. After watching a prolonged guerilla war in New Zealand against a Māori population of only 58,000, the Colonial Office ruled out taking land by a war of conquest against a Fijian population of 200,000." Hence indigenous Fijians



**Mahendra Chaudry –
deposed**

retain ownership of more than 83 percent of the land.

Colonisation took a very different path in Fiji than in Aotearoa. Fiji emerged as a sugar colony in which indentured Indian labourers were brought to Fiji to work on the sugar plantations (the first shipment of 464 indentured labourers was in 1879). This form of colonisation resulted in an ethnically segregated society, 49% Indian, 51% Fijian, in which the descendants of Indian labourers and indigenous Fijians live in ethnically segregated communities.

Throughout Fiji's history, the ruling class has been able to use the resulting ethnic divisions to



Speight – in control?

undermine working class unity. Despite the extreme exploitation, low wages and dire poverty endured by the working class majorities of both ethnic groups, it has been very hard sustaining a united labour movement.

The Fiji Labour Party emerged in response to a government freeze on wages in 1985. It adopted a social democratic manifesto outlining a reform programme, and had the support of the trade union movement. Crucially it brought Fijian and Indian workers together in the one party, and consequently was viewed as a major threat by the ruling class, the Chiefs and the army faction led by Rabuka.

When Labour was elected to power in April 1987, the ruling class responded with the first coup in May. The recent coup has essentially repeated the pattern of the earlier one. Then, as now, the only force that is ultimately capable of restoring democracy is the working class – Fijian and Indian – organised in trade

unions. It is vital that Fijian workers continue to mobilise to defeat George Speight and his thugs, the racism of the Taukei movement, and the big business backers of these right wing racists.

And it is equally crucial that trade unions in Australia and New Zealand continue to provide support for their fellow workers in Fiji. Despite the bleating of employers in New Zealand, the union bans on trade with Fiji have been, and are, highly effective in putting pressure on the corrupt and racist regime that has taken power. Above all else, working class unity and struggle against racism, against capitalism, against corruption, and against this regime – is the only way forward for Fijian workers.

Steel Workers Strike

More than 1000 workers at the Glenbrook steel mill in Auckland struck for a week after rejecting a 5 per cent pay rise.

The strike has raised fears among employers that it is the beginning of a winter of discontent in the workplace. Alasdair Thompson, head of the Auckland Employers and Manufacturers Association, said that the strike was a backward step that signalled the "re-unionisation of New Zealand." We say – let's bloody hope so! Unfortunately, the reality is that most workers remain reluctant to take action.

Engineers' Union Auckland regional secretary Mike Sweeney said 87 per cent of members had voted to strike. The strike was solid and forced the employer to offer 3 per cent in the coming year, and 2 percent the year after. But much more could have been achieved if the Engineers' Union had been prepared to push for a serious wage rise rather than hurrying to end the strike and broker a cosy deal with management.

As it is, the settlement will do little more than keep up with the rate of inflation, officially forecast to be 3% this year, and

higher than 2% next year. If we are ever going to get better pay and conditions, it will only come about if we join together with other rank and file members of our unions and push our officials to do better than the Glenbrook deal.

Otago University vice chancellor sacks 55 cleaners

Those who think that the election of a Labour/Alliance government is all that is required to defend workers' interests might like to ponder the plight of 55 cleaners at the University of Otago. These workers, who are predominantly women, low paid, and yet despite the poor pay have provided many years of service to the university – have been given the boot by Otago's hated VC Graeme Fogelberg. (Vice chancellors are effectively the chief executives of the universities).

He has decided to contract out cleaning services at Otago, despite the fact that the Service and Food Workers' Union devised a scheme that would have substantially reduced cleaning costs in the university. While Fogelberg claims that contracting out will save more than \$100,000, this is no more than would have been saved by the union scheme. It is a decision driven by his fervent anti unionism.

As pointed out by many other members of staff, the VC could save the university much more than \$100,000 if he and his two

industrial legislation. And so now, as much as ever, workers will not be able to defend their interests, let alone advance them, unless they push their unions to take concerted industrial action in support of their claims.

This is an argument that we all need to make in our workplaces – to convince our workmates of the need to fight for real improvements now. If we simply passively wait for this Government to improve things, we will be waiting a very long time!

Steven Wallace shooting

In the early hours of a Sunday morning, on April 30, a police officer shot Steven Wallace, aged 23, four times, killing him – supposedly in "self defence."

The media portrayed the shooting as unfortunate but necessary. Indeed, more often than not the media portrays the police as friendly and fair guardians of law and order – the protectors of our physical safety, property rights, and civil liberties. But there is no more than a tiny element of truth in this. In reality the key function that the police perform in capitalist society is protecting the wealth and power of the rich and powerful.

And far from treating everyone the same, the police regularly and routinely discriminate against Māori and Pacific Island peoples. The shooting of Steven Wallace in Waitara is just the most recent example of this. The cops would have been



Smile Graeme – no one else is

Deputy VCs flew Economy Class rather than First Class on their many jaunts around the world.

Members of the International Socialists supported a rally on May 26 to defend the cleaners with poster advertising and by producing the only placards that were present. But we would have liked to see the union do more than invite Labour/Alliance/Green MPs to speak to a passive crowd. There was no attempt to march around the Registry, nor was there any talk of industrial action.

What this highlights is that under this Government workers still face the same policies, employer militancy, and (regardless of the new Employment Relations Act) the same kind of broadly anti union



much more reluctant to gun down a man who was not carrying a firearm if he had been white.

Steven's family have received donations and calls of support from around the country since they announced plans for a private investigation. The family wants changes made to the law and police procedure to prevent further needless police killings, according to his uncle and family spokesman, Terry Wallace.

A trust fund has been set up to help with legal costs and other expenses incurred by his family in their fight for justice. We urge readers of *Socialist Review* to donate. Donations can be posted to the Steven Wallace Independent Inquiry Fund, PO Box 22, Waitara. Any funds not required will be given to a Memorial Trophy Scholarship for young people in Waitara.

Facts about corporate piggies

(Published Monday, April 17 2000 in the Baltimore Sun)

It's getting harder to tell CEO (heads of big corporations) paychecks from lottery payouts. Except that CEOs expect to win big even when the company loses.

When Coca Cola CEO Douglas Ivester announced

his retirement, Bloomberg compensation analyst Graef Crystal observed, "Here is a man who is resigning after a two year tenure as CEO that produced a return for shareholders of a negative 7.3 percent. For that, he is walking away with stock, options and other goodies worth at least \$120 million." Meanwhile, as the *AFL-CIO Executive PayWatch* reports, Coca Cola is laying off thousands of workers and facing a lawsuit alleging the company discriminated against black employees in promotions, pay and performance evaluations.

Many CEOs make more in a year than their employees will make in a lifetime. Last year, the average CEO of a major corporation earned \$12.4 million, including salary, bonus and other compensation such as exercised stock options, according to *Business Week's* latest survey of

executive pay. That's \$34,000 a day including Saturdays and Sundays.

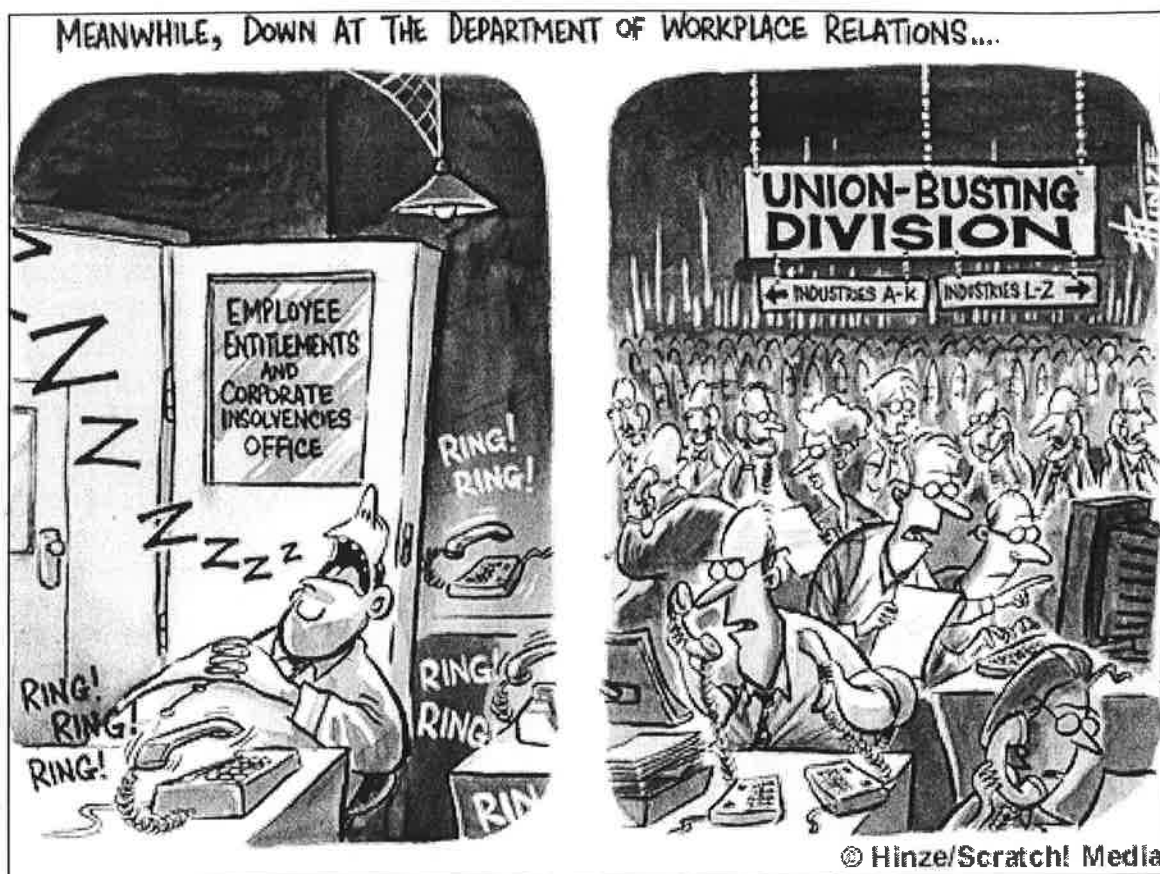
While average workers are still digging their way out after years of falling real wages, CEOs are soaring to heights once reserved for a handful of robber barons.

In 1980, CEOs made 42 times the pay of average factory workers. In 1990, they made 85 times as much. By 1999, CEOs made 475 times as much as workers. How big a gap will we tolerate?

The top CEOs earned as much as small countries last year. Computer Associates CEO Charles Wang led the gravy train with \$655 million. Next were Tyco International CEO L. Dennis Kozlowski with \$170 million, Charles Schwab CEO David Pottruck with \$128 million, Cisco CEO John Chambers with \$122 million and America Online CEO Steve Case with \$117 million.

Many CEOs have amassed future fortunes in stock options not yet exercised. Yahoo CEO Timothy Koogle leads with \$2.3 billion in unexercised stock options, followed by America Online's Steve Case with \$1.3 billion and Barry Diller of USA Networks with \$1 billion.

CEOs aren't shy about claiming all the credit for company success to justify taking a big chunk of the rewards. Mr. Kozlowski, Tyco CEO, told *Business Week*, "While I gained \$139 million [in stock options], I created about \$37 billion in wealth for our shareholders." Thousands of Tyco employees in 80 countries didn't have anything to do with creating that wealth apparently. Mr Kozlowski himself designs and services Tyco's fire safety and electronic security systems and must be very busy building the company's global undersea fibre optic communications network. ■



When the new coalition cabinet met for the first time since coming to power (pictured below), they knew their honeymoon couldn't last forever. Barely nine months into their first term, Labour and the Alliance are facing mounting attacks by business and the media, who accuse them of turning back the clock to bad "old" Labour days. Would this be a bad thing – and just how different is this government from the last? Socialist Review investigates...



In its editorial reception of the Labour/Alliance Government's first budget, the *National Business Review* heralds the budget as "a return to old Labour... Budget 2000 was a statement of Labour philosophy, far more in keeping with that of the Savage Labour Government than Kirk or Lange."

Cullen used his budget speech to espouse "classic Old Labour rhetoric, namely closing the gap between rich and poor; between wealthy urban New Zealand and the 'neglected' provinces." The *NBR* notes that a key stated objective of the budget is to achieve, "a fair and sustainable social and economic order", and considers that, overall, it

constitutes a revival of "the tried and failed policies of Kirk and Muldoon..."

Is it really the case that this Government, in terms of economic, social and industrial relations policies, is returning to the social democratic policies of the First Labour Government and National and Labour Governments of the 1940s, '50s and '60s?

"Neoliberalism", the economic policies of the New Right, has come to dominate most economic thinking today. Keynesianism, named after the British economist who, in the 1930s argued that the economy is not self regulating and needs regular government action to prevent major recessions, was the dominant economic theory in most countries during the post war period up until the 1980s.

It was Keynes' belief in the need for active economic intervention that justified extensive state intervention in the economy and society from the 1930s to the mid '80s. The state could regulate economic activity in order to maintain economic growth and full employment. Other aspects of the social democratic policy agenda included state development of infrastructure, public works, hydro electricity, roads, etc.; state intervention (subsidies and/or tax benefits) to encourage productive investment; extensive and tight regulation of the financial sector; control over foreign trade; limited state ownership (the "mixed economy"); comprehensive union coverage and centralised wage bargaining; public provision of housing, health, education and welfare funded by progressive taxation (the welfare state).

In view of this, is the current Government really charting a "third way" between this old style social democratic Keynesianism and the New Right? A glance at the *Budget Policy Statement, Budget 2000*, and the Employment

A return to...

Relations Bill might lend some support to this view. There appears to be a softening of the hard line monetarist approach to economic management enshrined in the Reserve Bank Act 1989 and Fiscal Responsibility Act 1994:

"The Government considers, as a general rule, that keeping revenues and expenses in at least broad balance on average, would be an appropriate fiscal policy consistent with good economic performance. This approach allows the automatic fiscal stabilisers to operate across the economic cycle, so taking pressure off monetary policy and reducing fluctuations in employment and output."

This suggests that the Government and Treasury are now acknowledging that fiscal policy can play at least a limited

role in balancing regular fluctuations in the economy.

Nonetheless it is important to note that the overall economic policy mix is still driven by a tight monetary policy aimed at maintaining 0-3% inflation, and that the medium term objective is to maintain substantial surpluses. It is also the case that the Government's policies remain firmly entrenched in a vision of the "liberating power of the market mechanism."

The second area in which it could be said that this Government is returning to "old Labour" is social spending, with increases in expenditure on education of \$300 million and health of \$412 million next year, and housing of \$600 million over the next three years.

The Government has committed \$114 million over the

next four years to close the "urgent and visible gaps" between "Māori and Pacific communities and others." And it has restored "the floor for New Zealand Superannuation to 65% of the average ordinary time net wage." However, this increased social spending remains restrained by a conservative economic strategy. The Government is strictly limiting new expenditure over the next four years with a provision of \$5.9 billion.

It is aiming to reduce government expenditure to, "below 35% of GDP over the next 10 years", "to reduce gross debt to below 30% of Gross Domestic Product... and net debt to below 20% of GDP...", and to achieve surpluses of \$763 million in 1999/00, \$1.01 billion in 200/01, \$2.1 billion in 2001/02, and \$2.7 billion in 2002/03.

The third area is industrial relations. The Employment Relations Bill modifies the Employment Contracts Act with respect to some of the harsher anti union provisions in the Act, crucially improving union organising and bargaining rights and making it legal for workers to take industrial action in support of multi employer contracts. But a detailed analysis of the ERB reveals that in fact it leaves the essential features of the industrial relations system created by the Contracts Act in 1991 in place, and with respect to the tremendously important right to strike provisions it is, if anything, even worse than the ECA.

It should be evident that these policy changes, however generous they may appear in contrast with the further implementation of the New

effect of 16 years of New Right policies has been to dramatically increase the major forms of social inequality while failing to generate sustained economic growth and low unemployment. Putting it crudely, these policies have made the richest 10% of the population substantially richer at the expense of the low and middle income earners who constitute 70% of the population. Nothing this Government has done, or is likely to do, will substantially reduce the widening gap between rich and poor. To reduce the gap would require, among other things: 1) substantial tax increases for high income earners and corporations, combined with; 2) the restoration of benefits to their pre 1991 levels in real terms and; 3) the introduction of industrial relations legislation eliminating current (ECA) restrictions on the right to strike and allowing for a return to comprehensive union coverage and centralised wage bargaining.

In reality the policy agenda of the Labour/Alliance Government involves giving a few crumbs back to the working class majority. But the big pieces of cake that have been given to the rich by Labour and National Governments from 1984 to 1999 through tax cuts, privatisation, rising executive salaries, the Employment Contracts Act, and so forth, remain with the greedy minority who hold the bulk of the wealth and power in this society.

Ultimately the most important factor in determining whether or not a government in New Zealand will seriously roll back the New Right

no government could ignore." Further, the Government has been guilty of "an over estimation of the power of an electoral mandate and a serious misjudgement of the influence of the business sector."

Business confidence, as measured by the National Bank's regular survey, fell sharply in May 2000, evoking profuse expressions of business friendliness from Prime Minister Clark and Treasurer Cullen. What this highlights is just how desperately business wants to retain its major political and economics gains since 1984. Clearly it is prepared to continue waging class war, through both continued employer industrial militancy and the lobbying activity of the major business associations.

The situation with respect to the trade union movement is rather different. There is absolutely no conception, at least within the leadership of the NZCTU, that significant change in economic, social and industrial relations policy is only likely to be achieved through a prolonged campaign of generalised industrial and political action. If the objective really is to close "the growing gap between rich and poor" then a two pronged strategy is required.

One prong involves reviving traditions of industrial militancy, in danger of being lost but today still exemplified by the Seafarers' Union, in order to push for substantial wage increases and improvements in employment security and conditions.

The other is going beyond simpering adoration of this

"Old" Labour?

Right agenda promised by the National and Act parties prior to the 1999 election, do not signal a return to "old Labour" in the sense of social democratic Keynesianism. Rather, what they do constitute is a small adjustment to the prevailing neoliberal policy agenda. Far from a return to "old Labour", what we are seeing is the introduction of "neoliberalism with a human face" (that is, little more than minor policy changes behind the rhetoric).

As already described, the overall

agenda is not the composition of the New Zealand parliament. It is what Marxists refer to as the "balance of class forces." At present the so called "business community" (or capitalist class) is strongly voicing its opposition to the slight moderation of the New Right agenda currently being implemented by this Government.

As the *National Business Review* puts it, "Mounting concerns over the Employment Relations Bill saw the business world turn against the coalition in a display of strength that

Government, to actually advancing the interests of rank and file union members by actively campaigning for the removal of the draconian restrictions on industrial action established by the ECA. In the absence of a revival of industrial militancy and the mounting of such a campaign by the NZCTU, little real change is likely to come via parliament. ■

Brian Roper

The Public Servants Association:

a union leadership that refuses to fight for better pay and conditions

As a union the PSA has been in trouble since the passing of the State Sector Act in 1988. These problems were intensified with the passing of the Employment Contracts Act (ECA) in 1991 and since that time its membership has haemorrhaged from around 65,000 in the early 1990s to around 40,000 at present.

The losses in membership have partly been due to the major restructuring of the public sector and the anti-union climate in New Zealand. However, a significant portion of the losses can also be blamed on the PSA leadership's organising tactics that have failed to adequately defend the interests of their rank and file members.

After failing to resist the imposition of the State Sector Act in 1988, the PSA leadership, against the wishes of a majority of its members refused to call for a general strike against the ECA. This resulted in a major demoralisation within the union – ironically even more so for the leadership than the members. Throughout the 1990s the leadership was paralysed by an ongoing state of demoralisation which they were unable and unwilling to overcome.

Since the defeats of 1988 and 1991, instead of organising to best defend the needs of its members the PSA has put its faith in working alongside management in the public sector. This went under the name of workplace reform which was an attempt to incorporate labour into the management process in a very selective and limited way in order to boost labour productivity and "work quality."

Recently this policy has been formalised under the name "Partnership for Quality" (PFQ) which

is defined as "the PSA strategy for achieving industrial, political, economic, and social advancement for our members." The current government has approved this strategy and recently the PSA signed an agreement with the State Services Minister Trevor Mallard and will begin working with the State Services Commission to implement this policy in the core government sector.

Once again this essentially involves allocating more union resources for working with managers and less for organising the members.

The PFQ strategy was adopted after a drawn out and bitter internal struggle. Many members and paid staff opposed the direction, arguing that it compromised the ability of the union to put its members' interests first and that it was in direct opposition to trade union principles.

The struggle saw many long serving staff and elected officials resign, retire or be "helped" on their way in the push to impose the new direction. One recent past high profile president will not even belong to the PSA, in protest at what has happened, and has joined another union at his place of employment.

Supporters of the PFQ approach have enshrined it in the official union principles and enacted changes to ensure that it will be very difficult to overturn. An example of this can be seen in the process by which delegates get elected to any of the PSA's sector committees.

To be eligible for election candidates must meet a range of criteria which include having a "commitment to Partnership for Quality." Not having such a

commitment means that the candidate is unlikely to be selected, "as those already on the committee have such a commitment."

Other options open to members who do not agree with the approach such as expressing opposition in the *PSA Journal* have also been removed as the paid staff of the union have editorial control of the journal and will not publish articles dissenting with the PFQ strategy.

So what are the options for current members of the PSA? There are at least two:

- Attempt to find other members who are dissatisfied with the current PSA approach and agitate for a change in policy.

- Consider joining another union. Alternative unions operating in the public sector include the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), and the Service Workers Union. These unions have a much better record of organising effectively to advance their members' interests.

Whether members decide to stay or go will probably depend on whether or not they have a meaningful choice between the PSA and a more militant union in their workplace.

For those of us who do not have the option of joining a more militant union, we will have to continue the fight both for more democracy within the PSA and for a shift towards a more militant industrial strategy for advancing members' interests. ■

Gerry Cotterell

(Gerry Cotterell is a member of the PSA and wrote this article for *Socialist Review* after attending the most recent PSA delegates' conference.)

"Dissident" PSA members can be contacted via Socialist Review: write to us at P O Box 6157 Dunedin North or email isonz@hotmail.com

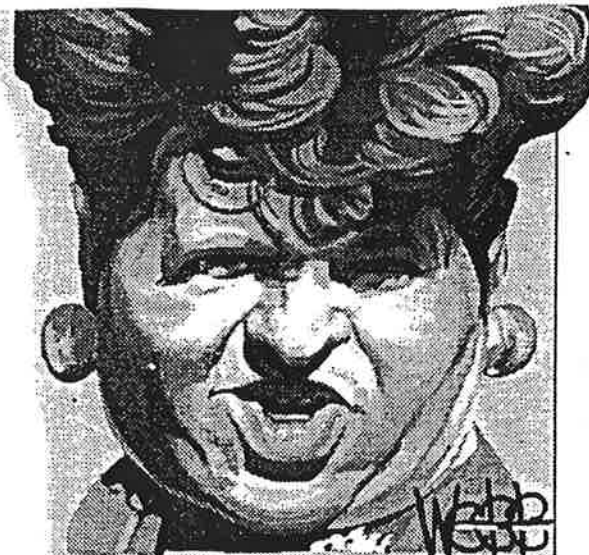
Big Money backs the National Party

Pre-election funding for the major parliamentary parties gives an important indication of who big business wants to see in power. Prior to the 1984 election corporate backing swung towards Labour, and Labour also got heaps of money from business prior to the 1987 election as a vote of appreciation from the rich for the corporate lolly scramble that was Rogernomics.

In the run up to the 1990 election business shifted its allegiance to National because it thought that Labour hadn't gone far enough towards dismantling the welfare state and "deregulating the labour market" (that is, attacking unions). National used this unprecedented level of corporate funding to stage a highly effective and successful election campaign.

Once in power Ruth Richardson then gave business what it wanted in the form of the Employment Contracts Act in 1991 that led to the halving of union membership. This was followed soon after with cuts to benefits for the poor, increased fees and allowances for students, user charges in health, and tax cuts for the rich. After leaving parliament she happily accepted a seat on the hard right wing Business Roundtable and joined Act.

In 1993 and 1996 big business continued to heavily support the National and Act parties, while providing some more limited funding for Labour in order to keep it in line with the New Right agenda it had introduced from 1984 to 1990. Funding Labour is an insurance policy against the possibility of a popular electoral backlash against pro business and anti working class policies.



BEASTLY: A scumbag reporter wanted to know how J felt being unemployed after what she said about Sue Bradford

The Alliance, which campaigned on the basis of the most pro worker policies of any of the parties, was the third largest spender (\$744,711). However, it is fair to assume that a high proportion of this money came from small scale fundraising by members, rather than from the big corporations. Nonetheless it is clear that the Alliance got some business money.

The Greens spent a mere \$235,918 on their campaign, and

Students at universities and polytechnics around the country were among the many diverse groups who breathed a collective sigh of relief when watching the death agonies of the National Government last year. The new Labour/Alliance regime has been welcomed by students for their education policies and their stated opposition to the kind of "business" model pursued so insanely by previous National Governments.

Of course, this support for the new government is completely understandable. They have removed the interest on student loans while students are still studying, they have tried to stop any fee increases next year and they have told universities to stop wasting funds competing with each other in marketing madness. All of this combines to make the Labour/Alliance government seem very much a Good Thing for students.

For those of us – and we are, by now, almost an entire generation – who have grown up under nothing but New Right approaches to education it seems like a very good thing indeed. But it is crucial that, while supporting this government against the ridiculous attacks against it from business and the right, we recognise also that

these changes are in fact particularly short lived ones. To end the injustices of the New Right model more than

a few minor face painting reforms are required. We can, and must, begin to demand real change.

Until 1984 a tertiary education in New Zealand was effectively free, there were universal allowances for students and universities had the ability to fund and offer extensive courses in many subjects which are now threatened because of their small numbers, such as Russian, German and so on. The Fourth Labour Government began the end of this state of affairs by introducing, alongside all the other unpleasanties, a series of tertiary fees, a student loan scheme, a beginning of the market model in education and so on.

While these New Right reforms have been around for a while – 16 years now – this does not mean that the older state of affairs can never come again. Those who tell you that we simply "can't afford free education any more" are talking nonsense. If a taxation system existed that ensured Doug Myers, Roger Kerr and a few of their mates paid a fair share of their taxes then there would be plenty of money available!

It seems odd that the government which can pour millions into Olympic funding, America's Cup support and other assorted wastes of money can then turn around and tell students there is no money for the country's education system. Free education and universal student allowances are things we can win again – they existed in the past, they can again now.

We need to remember some basic points about this issue that the Labour Party's move to cut interest payments has obscured. Even if the interest on a loan is removed while someone is studying, this system still means that the poor pay more for their education than the rich. Without universal student allowances, students remain the only group in the country who have to borrow just to eat. These statements are just as true under Labour/Alliance as they were under National. User pays education continues to discriminate against the poor, Maori and women. It is unfair.

Many who agree with these sentiments respond by saying, "Yes, but we need to give this government a chance. If we criticise them now then this will just weaken their position and leave the way open again for National." In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Business attacks on this government, which have been constant since it took office, have shown that all areas of the political spectrum intend pressuring it.

Business has far more power than students, and amendments to the Employment Relations Bill show that this government is trying to accommodate them. Without keeping up their struggle students will

become lost in the myriad of pressure groups and interest sectors sitting at the feet of Helen Clark, waiting for their turn.

History has shown us real change is never delivered from above. Rather, it is always won from below. The goals of free education and universal student allowances are ones students can win from a government, but ones which will never be given to them.

This is why now, more than ever, it is vital that student activism revives. Students are not the apathetic disillusioned group liberals paint them as: the nineties were a decade marked by student occupations, marches and militancy. Just this year

Building a new Education Campaign

several hundred students marched on the offices of WINZ to protest their incompetence, a march which quickly turned to demand wider, "real" change.

It is this way – through marches, militant actions and occupations, that we can force the Government to move beyond face painting with cosmetic changes and get it to deliver real and just reforms. To do this students, and a mass of them, need to get involved in Education Action Groups, protest movements and wider political considerations. Our actions do not undermine the cause of change, they assist it. While it is not true that students here and now have nothing to lose but their chains, it is fair to say we still have a world to win. ■



DRINK.
DRIVE.
BLOODY IDIOT.



WORK.
DIE.
BLOODY INVISIBLE.

Globalise revolt!

the great Seattle protests that shut down the WTO

American socialist Sharon Smith reports

There was a time when the city of Seattle was identified most immediately with the "new" American model of capitalism – a leaner, meaner and more globalised capitalist system. Two of the most internationally recognised symbols of the new international system were from Seattle – Starbucks and Microsoft. A third, the athletic shoe giant Nike, was headquartered nearby.

But that seems like a millennium ago now. Today Seattle has become a symbol of a completely different kind. Indeed, one could even say that it has come to represent the exact opposite of what the corporate chiefs and politicians had so carefully nurtured – a symbol of the diverse and ever growing opposition to corporate power, local and global. The Battle of Seattle, as the protest against the WTO has become known in the press, was in essence a fight for human needs against the greed and profit motive that rules the world. The many thousands who came to Seattle, and those who protested elsewhere, were concerned with many issues – the environment, human rights, child labour and Third World poverty, among others. But they were also clearly united by a common sentiment – hostility to the transnational corporations and their allies in government, both here in the US and around the world.

In the aftermath of the WTO protests, mainstream newspapers searched for an explanation for the events. In the end it wasn't difficult even for the wilfully blind of the mainstream media to conclude a simple truth. As one newspaper wrote, "They are folks who don't check each day to see how their 401K is doing or hang out with people who have become millionaires when their companies went public. What they all seem to agree on is that giant corporations have gone too far in gaining control over their lives and defining the values of their culture, and that the WTO has become a handmaiden of those corporate interests." Simple and to the point. But what these commentators often miss is just how deep this sentiment runs. And it is not surprising either, since most media commentators have missed out on the most important aspect of the new capitalism that ordinary workers understand all too well – what is good for the rich is not good for workers. The depth of the resentment felt by ordinary workers is combined with an understanding that the rich and their politicians have been lining their pockets like never before.

The growing inequality between rich and poor – between haves and have nots – is common knowledge to the majority of those who demonstrated against the WTO. A UN report issued last July, for example, reported that the three richest billionaires in the world – Microsoft's Bill Gates being one – owned more than the combined gross national product of all the world's least developed countries and their combined population of 600 million people. According to the report, while 1.3 billion people struggle to live on less than \$1 a day, the world's richest 200 people doubled their net worth between 1994 and 1998 to more than \$1 trillion.

About 840 million people are malnourished, and close to one billion find it difficult to meet their basic consumption requirements. More than 880 million people lack access to health services and 2.6 billion people have no access to basic sanitation. Far from narrowing, the gulf between rich and poor is growing. "Some have predicted

convergence. Yet the past decade has shown increasing concentration of income, resources and wealth among people, corporations and countries", the report states. The income gap between the fifth of the world's population in the wealthiest countries and the poorest fifth of the world's population was 74 to 1 in 1997 – up from 60 to 1 in 1990 and 30 to 1 in 1960. This vast concentration of wealth in the hands of a tiny layer of people at the top of the heap exposes them for the parasites they are, and their system for what it is.

The figures for the US help explain why there has been such a dramatic shift in the outlook and attitude of so many ordinary people. Take the difference in pay between workers and corporate executives. A report issued last year showed that the gap between the pay of corporate executives and workers has grown more than tenfold in the US over the last two decades. In 1980 the chief executive officers (CEOs) of major corporations made an average of 42 times the pay of the average worker. Today's top bosses make a stunning 419 times the pay of the average worker.

And despite all the talk of economic recovery, its benefits have clearly been lopsided. To quote only one of many reports, *The state of working America 1998-99*, put out by the Economic Policy Institute last year, "Putting recent economic gains in historical context, the study finds that the living standards of most working families still have not recovered from the recession of the early 1990s, nor have their wages kept pace with the growth in productivity. The income growth that has been generated among middle income families has been driven largely by an increase in working hours to make up for the long term deterioration of wages. The economic realities facing the typical American family over the 1990s include increased hours of work, stagnant or falling income, and less secure jobs offering fewer benefits."

This massive shift in wealth has not gone without a parallel attack on workers' rights. Indeed, the attack on workers' rights, organisations and living standards has been the precondition for the economic expansion of the last several years. The corporations and Wall Street began their current binge in the aftermath of Ronald Reagan's defeat of the air traffic controllers' strike in 1981. This was the start of a long period of retreat and concessions on the part of labour. Last year the Brussels based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) summarised the state of the US labour movement by arguing that US workers are effectively stripped of their right to belong to a trade union. The ICFTU report concludes, "While in theory, US law provides for workers to have freedom of association, the right to join trade unions and participate in collective bargaining is in practice denied to large segments of the American workforce in both the public and the private sectors."

In the wake of the Battle of Seattle, it is important to remember that symbols come and go. But the process that began before Seattle will continue well after the battle in the streets. ■

Socialist Review is selling copies of the great documentary video *Showdown in Seattle*. It is a fantastic documentary that everyone on the left should see. The price is \$8 to cover our costs. If you are outside Dunedin then please add \$4 to cover the cost of postage. Write to us at P O Box 6157, Dunedin North.



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Red Rosa

Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) is one of those amazing figures confined to the footnotes of establishment history because her ideas, and the inspiration her life provides, are so dangerous and revolutionary. Called "the sharp sword, the living flame of revolution" by her friend and collaborator the German socialist-feminist Clara Zetkin, Luxemburg dedicated her whole life – and eventually her death too – towards furthering the cause of workers' revolution in both her native Poland, Germany and the world. *Dougal McNeill* and *Fleur Taylor* examine some of her contributions to the Marxist tradition.

On the 15 of January 1919 Rosa Luxemburg had her head smashed in with the butt of a soldier's rifle. She had been organising and agitating for the workers' revolution which was breaking out sporadically throughout German, and especially Berlin. The soldier who so cruelly murdered her was "fighting to defend" the newly appointed German liberal regime, a regime which included the formerly revolutionary German Social Democratic Party (the SPD). This party had turned against the very revolution of workers it had always claimed to support. In her death, Rosa Luxemburg provided the best argument in the case she had been proposing all her life – against reformism, against the ability of capitalism to civilise itself, and for the revolutionary potential of the working class.

Reform or Revolution?

This cowardly U-turn by the SPD when its words could have turned into actions was the final product of a long decline in the party's political integrity. As early as 1899 Rosa Luxemburg had dealt with the dangers of reformism and complacency in polemics against a fellow party member, Eduard Bernstein. Bernstein had argued that the fundamentals of Marxism needed revisiting, that some of the basic concepts were outdated. He saw the idea of "evolution" as more appropriate to capitalism in a liberal democracy than "revolution." If – according to his logic – the workers were a majority of the society then the election of a workers' party to parliament could produce the socialist society.

Rosa Luxemburg's refutation of this wishful thinking has relevance to New Zealand today. In her pamphlet *Reform or revolution* she showed clearly how parliament was a captive to those with the real power in society, the capitalists who control the wealth and means of production. Thus business attacks on our current Labour government have led them to moderate their reforms in the Employment Relations Bill, despite the fact that the majority of workers feel these reforms do not go nearly far enough. Similarly, the way which Labour, a so called workers' party, began the entire New Right project in the 1980s proves Luxemburg's theories. Parliament will reflect the balance of class forces in the wider community. It cannot create them.

Reform or revolution is equally scornful of those thinkers who attempt to find a division between these two terms. Politicians from Labour and the Alliance try to show their policies as working in the "here and now" as opposed to the romantic

dreaming of revolutionaries. Rosa Luxemburg showed clearly how this was not the case. Just as reformist parties cannot

legislate socialism, nor are they a driving force for reform. She wrote, "Every legal constitution is the product of a revolution... revolution is the act of political creation, while legislation is the political expression of the life of a society that has already come into being." In other words, governments will respond with legislation to changes forced upon them from below. By acting in a revolutionary manner – through strikes, protests, occupations and the like – workers are helping the cause of practical reform.

An understanding of this helps us counter the arguments of those union bureaucrats who argue we ought to "give Labour a chance" to institute change. Without pressure from workers then the government will remain captive to business threats and cajoling. By working for the final aim, a revolution where the majority are finally in control of their own

society, we also further practical goals in the "here and now." This was true for workers in Germany at the start of the last century – it is true for us in New Zealand now. The Fourth Labour Government revealed the dangers of waiting for a "workers'" or "left wing" government to deliver better lives for the majority. This is a battle which can be won only on the streets, the workplaces and the campuses of this country.

The Mass Strike

OK, so how do we get to this revolution? When a revolution broke out spontaneously in Russia in 1905, Rosa Luxemburg smuggled herself into the Tsar's kingdom to observe it at first hand. She learnt valuable lessons from the experience of 1905, and the next summer wrote her famous work *The mass strike*. In this pamphlet Luxemburg examined the way that strikes in Russia had turned quickly from economic ones, focussed on concrete claims at an engineering work, to political ones, making demands for democratic reforms. In good times workers might be able to win limited economic concessions, but in times of hardship they will often need to defend themselves against the political system too, and this defence can often transform into an offensive against capitalist oppression. The mass strike, which stops capitalism in its tracks, was one of the working class's most powerful weapons in this struggle.



The German Social Democrats, as with every parliamentary socialist party before and after, saw the political role of workers as voting for change and little else. Like our modern union officials, they saw the distinction between politics and economics in strike action as vital. A strike over economic issues is valid, one over a political point invalid. This sort of logic drives the CTU's responses to the National and Coalition Governments.

Rosa Luxemburg saw the flaws which crippled this understanding of working class politics. Capitalism and exploitation are fundamentally connected, and so a protest against one specific form of exploitation needs to take into account its causes. In this way protests against the Employment Contracts Bill in 1991 were at once political and economic. To keep their jobs and job security, New Zealand workers needed to challenge not only their new conditions of employment, but also the government and political systems which were rearranging them.

But strikes are not only useful tools in the day to day political and economic struggle, what has been called the "bridge between the here and now and the socialist future." They are also wonderful opportunities for us to have experience of organising for ourselves, organising democratically and as groups, and seeing that this can work. Strike action, especially successful strike action, gives its participants a new found sense of confidence and solidarity, it counters the sense of isolation and despair everyday life cultivates so well. Luxemburg expressed this beautifully, "After every soaring wave of political action there remains a fertile sediment from which sprout a thousand economic struggles... the economic struggle continues... the permanent reservoir of working class strength from which political struggle always imbibes new strength." In other words, confidence builds more confidence, small struggles lead to greater struggles. In New Zealand this became obvious in the tertiary fees campaigns. In 1993 a mass occupation of Otago University's Registry radicalised many students and led to more widespread and bigger actions in the following years.

Confidence in one area can lead on to another. In this way women workers who engage in an economic struggle can find the confidence to collectively challenge sexual harassment by foremen. This happened in the Russian strikes of 1905 which so inspired Rosa Luxemburg. Similar examples can be found in the struggle against racism in the United States.

The mass strike is a way the majority can take events into their own hands. It is an expression of the true vision of democracy. From it we can learn how to organise collectively, how to stand up to the system and how to fight together. We learn from the mass strike that we're not as stupid and useless as the mythologies of management and leadership spun under capitalism would have us believe. Luxemburg writes that, "in order that the working class may participate *en masse* in any direct political action, it must first organise itself, which above all means that it must obliterate the boundaries between factories and workshops... which the daily yoke of capitalism condemns it to."

Strikes on their own will not overthrow a system as entrenched as capitalism. Trade union officials work their hardest to contain them, and without a revolutionary organisation strikes can lose momentum and political direction. But they can provide a spark for swift, sudden and unexpected radicalisation and revolt. This is the legacy of 1905, echoing through history still, from Paris in 1968 to Seattle just last year.

Democracy

Not only do Rosa Luxemburg's writings provide valuable ideas in the struggle for socialism, her works stand in stark and inspiring contrast to those thinkers who have viewed socialism as something to be imposed, something which can be achieved

through terror and compulsion. It was not for nothing that Stalin posthumously condemned Rosa Luxemburg, for her socialism and democracy were both inconceivable without the other. Her works stand in the classical Marxist tradition of seeing socialism as something which only the immense majority of society can achieve for themselves and by themselves. It cannot be imposed by either parliament in Labour Party style or by a tiny force of "enlightened" terrorists.



Luxemburg expresses this with characteristic elegance, "Socialism will not and cannot be created by decrees; nor can it be established by any government, however socialist. Socialism must be created by the mass of the population themselves... where the chains of capitalism are forged, there they must be broken."

But socialism is not only the creation of a truly democratic society. It is the establishment of a truly human society. Rosa Luxemburg's writing sparkles with this sense of "honest indignation", that Marxists must focus on economics and politics not because they are the stuff of life, but because they dominate our lives. She loved cats – Lenin could not discuss politics with her until he had asked after her beloved Mimi! – gardening, reading and music. Her life was focussed around achieving revolution so the real business of life, developing our own abilities and potentials, could be truly achieved.

Rosa Luxemburg was realistic about this revolution. She realised that capitalism will not be overthrown merely by being ignored, as the dismal failure of hippy communes attests. She knew that those with all the power at the moment would not give it up without a fight. But sometimes pacifism can lead to more death than swift response, and Luxemburg saw the necessity of tragedy capitalism had forced on its opponents. In lines all revolutionaries should take to heart, she wrote in the newspaper *Rote Fahne* (Red Flag) during the 1918 revolution, "Rivers of blood streamed [during World War One]. Now we must be sure to preserve every drop of this precious liquid with honour and in crystal glasses. Uncurbed revolutionary energy and wide human feeling – this is the real breath of socialism. It is true that a whole world has to be overturned, but any tear that could have been avoided is an accusation; a man who hastens to perform an important deed and unthinkingly treads upon a worm on his way is committing a crime."

Like any socialist, Rosa Luxemburg made many mistakes, both theoretical and political. Her desire for unity lead her to stay in the SPD long after it had degenerated into time serving and reformism. The German revolution was marred by disorganisation on the part of the Spartakus League – Luxemburg and Liebknecht's embryonic communist party – and her major economic work, *The accumulation of capital*, has generated enormous controversy. Yet the enduring legacy of Rosa Luxemburg for socialists is one of inspiration: of inspirational ideas and an inspirational life, both dedicated towards the destruction of the inhumanity, the waste and the senselessness which govern the modern world. Luxemburg worked tirelessly for the vision set out in Marx's *Capital* for a "society in which the full and free development of every individual is the ruling principle."

This is the society we are still fighting for today. ■

SOCIALIST REVIEW AIMS TO PROVIDE A CLEAR ANALYSIS OF WHY THINGS ARE THE WAY THEY ARE, AND REALISTIC ANSWERS ABOUT HOW WE CAN BRING ABOUT CHANGE. BUT WE ALSO REALISE THAT FOR MOST OF US THE WORLD IS NOT A VERY FRIENDLY OR WELCOMING PLACE. THIS ISSUE WE ARE LAUNCHING RED WORDS, A REGULAR SECTION OF THE MAGAZINE FEATURING CLASSIC AND NEW POETRY, SHORT STORIES AND REVIEWS, AS WELL AS TAKING A LOOK AT THE LIVES OF WELL KNOWN FIGURES IN THE CULTURAL WORLD THROUGH A FRESH LENS. THESE ARE RED WORDS – TO INSPIRE AND CONSOLE US – TO GIVE US HOPE TO FIGHT FOR A BETTER WORLD.

IN THE FIRST INSTALMENT OF RED WORDS WE FEATURE A NEW TRANSLATION OF POETRY BY GERMAN REVOLUTIONARY KARL LIEBKNECHT; NEW ZEALANDER DAVID PARKYN, A DIFFERENT READING OF GRAFFITI, AND AN IN DEPTH LOOK AT THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE – A SOCIALIST WHO USED HIS WRITINGS TO SATIRISE VICTORIAN SOCIETY. WE ENCOURAGE ALL READERS TO SEND THEIR OWN CONTRIBUTIONS TO RED WORDS.

RED WORDS

In 1980 David Parkyn brought together a collection of his poems – *Children of the storm* – published by Tin Drum Publications. In these poems he does something that most published poets in New Zealand today do not – he provides a strong political critique of a capitalist society that is riddled with inequality. Here we present a few short excerpts from his classic poem – *I was raised on the battlefield*.

I WAS RAISED ON THE BATTLEFIELD

I was raised on the battlefield between Kelburn and Highbury
in the city of Wellington in the country called New Zealand
A peaceful scene you would say, if you skimmed the surface
Missing the trenches, the dugouts, the advances and retreats
the dead and the wounded of embryonic class war

And the bus pulled out and headed for the hills
Past the home of the bishop confusing justice with silence and silence with peace
past the home of the investor who shares this belief
Past the accountant's only son who thinks he made it on his own
Past the homes of all the good people who never throw stones
Glass house people! Melted from the burned down potentials
of millions of toiling grains of sand who have sweated to make this country
a land of hope and of plenty, a land of milk and honey
A land turning sour, going rancid from the droppings of its financier drones
Parasites! In masks of economic necessity
Parasites! In masks of purchased respectability
And all the while our primeval paradise rots before our eyes
as, surrounded by their servants Unemployment and Surplus Value
a privileged caste of colonials arise like phantom rats on a pilgrim ship
Like ghosts of highwaymen buried on the hightide of world war and boomtime wool prices
uncovered 'neath the gravestone of postwar depression

And set in the middle the great mass of people
pulled this way and that way in a crossfire of deception
blaming their misfortunes on themselves or each other
Unsure and uncertain where to cast the first stone

We are raised on the battlefield, between Intuition and Reason
In cities of hopefulness in a country called New Zealand
sited at the border of Independence and Treason, Armageddon and Eden

We're soldiers conscripted in embryonic class war



Walk on the Wilde side

Oscar Wilde is remembered for style rather than substance. But Wilde was a socialist who used his writing to satirise society, as *Gareth Jenkins* explains

Socialism is not normally the word associated with Oscar Wilde. The image we have of him is that of a non-political dandy who conquered late 19th century high society with his brilliant conversation and wit, only to fall from favour because of his conviction in 1895 for sexual indecency.

Yet as his biographer, Richard Ellman, points out, 'From as early as 1881, when he was in his late 20s, to the middle of 1895, when he was 40, literary London was put out of countenance by this outrageous Irishman from Dublin (via Oxford), who declared he was a socialist and hinted he was a homosexual, while patently mocking wise saws on all subjects. He declined, in a public and ceremonious manner, to live within his means, behave modestly, respect his elders, or recognise such entities as nature and art in their traditional apparel.'

This brings out Wilde's rebelliousness. It suggests that the trial which sent him to prison for two years and broke his health was not simply personal victimisation. It was revenge on a man who challenged society's sexual codes and its class basis.

Wilde was tried for a sexual offence which had only come onto the statute book ten years earlier. It was part of the tightening up of sexual morality in the late 19th century which accompanied the recreation of the family, and family values, as the bedrock of society. It identified the 'sexual deviant' as the antithesis of proper 'manliness'. Young men, like the hero of E M Forster's novel *Maurice*, dreaded the thought that they were 'unspeakables of the Oscar Wilde variety'.

Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, son of the Marquess of Queensberry, escaped prosecution. The charges against Wilde involved male prostitutes who were put under pressure by Queensberry to testify and save their skins. The unwritten assumption was that it was Wilde, with his low connections, who had perverted a youthful aristocrat.

Nor was the Irish dimension missing. The prosecution counsel who badgered and finally cornered Wilde in the witness box was Edward Carson, an old classmate of Wilde from Trinity College Dublin. But Carson had no sympathy for Ireland's wrongs, as Wilde had. Carson was a fanatical Ulsterman. The reputation he gained as a result of the trial he used in the years before the First World War to organise reactionary military opposition to Irish Home Rule.

The trial, then, was not just about morality. It was about class and nation. Wilde was the enemy within. Prosecuting and breaking him was a way of trying to lay the spectres which were returning to haunt British society for the first time since the death of Chartism in the early 1850s.

By the early 1890s the confidence of the British ruling class had been shaken. The 1880s had marked the beginning of the Great Depression, which particularly affected agriculture. Britain's global pre-eminence was under challenge from economic rivals. The ideology of free trade and liberalism, which had hitherto been taken for granted, was being questioned—and not just by alternatives such as protectionism. Socialism

began to revive as social peace dissolved in bitter class antagonism. And Irish nationalism, which had never died, took on fresh vigour, with famine once again stalking that land.

Wilde's arrival in the London of the 1880s coincided with the first few tremors of the impending storm. The ruling class could sense that its hegemony over society might be less secure than it supposed. Only this explains its reaction to Wilde and the threat it eventually saw in what he was both saying and doing.

It was against Victorian artistic values that Wilde first revolted. He rejected ugliness and the subordination of art to usefulness. Like the critic John Ruskin, who had influenced him at Oxford, he saw in the debasement of 19th century art the debasement of society itself. Unlike Ruskin, however, he did not want art to find some true morality but for art to free itself altogether from morality. In that way the individual could fully emerge from the cramped conditions imposed by convention.

His rejection of Victorian art paralleled that of another of Ruskin's disciples, William Morris. But, initially at least, Wilde's rejection took a different route. Where Morris's rebelliousness took him towards socialist organisation and activity, Wilde's took him towards propagandising about 'art for art's sake'.

This is the best known aspect of Wilde's life and writings. He argued that human beings should cultivate their aesthetic sensibilities, their appreciation of beautiful artistry. His arguments were designed to shock. To assert that 'all art is quite useless' and that 'all art is immoral' was his provocative way of slaughtering the sacred cows of Victorian thinking on the subject. Life, he was saying, should consist of more than adherence to dull and restrictive notions of what was useful or moral. It should aspire to the freedom of art and the variety of experience it contains.

Wilde himself lived the artistic life—particularly in the early 1880s when his first book of poems came out—wearing knee breeches, silk stockings, brightly coloured handkerchief and tie, extravagant hat and exotic flower in his buttonhole. As he explained in his mock-serious advice to the young in 1894: 'One should either be a work of art, or wear a work of art... To love oneself is the beginning of a life long romance.' This was style as revolt against convention.

He was jeered at rather than condemned in the early 1880s. Gilbert and Sullivan wrote an operetta parodying the aesthetic movement, in which Bunthorne (Wilde) walks down the Strand with a lily in his hand. Though one critic of the period, lumping together very different elements, denounced all this as the fleshly school of poetry, the kind of hysteria against moral and sexual 'decadence' which featured at Wilde's trial was still in the future.

Victorian society could reluctantly live with the image of the languid, self-obsessed and narcissistic aesthete. And if Wilde had retreated into art as a refuge from the awfulness of life in the late Victorian period, he might have been little more than a literary footnote to history.

But Wilde did not rest content with aestheticism. His commitment to art took him towards an engagement with social issues, not away from them. He never renounced style and wit but paradoxically he took them seriously as weapons. It led him to socialism (though unlike William Morris never into the movement).

How did this happen? If Wilde refused to retreat into art, he also refused to retreat into ancestor worship. In this crucial matter he differed fundamentally from Ruskin. Ruskin had idealised the feudal order of the Middle Ages as exercising a responsibility towards the poor absent from the market economy of the 19th century. Ruskin's motto was, turn the clock back to the period before capitalism and democracy and revive the virtues of aristocracy. Wilde's position, on the other

hand, was to proclaim his belief in the modern. In so doing he forged a strategy for his assault on those at the top.

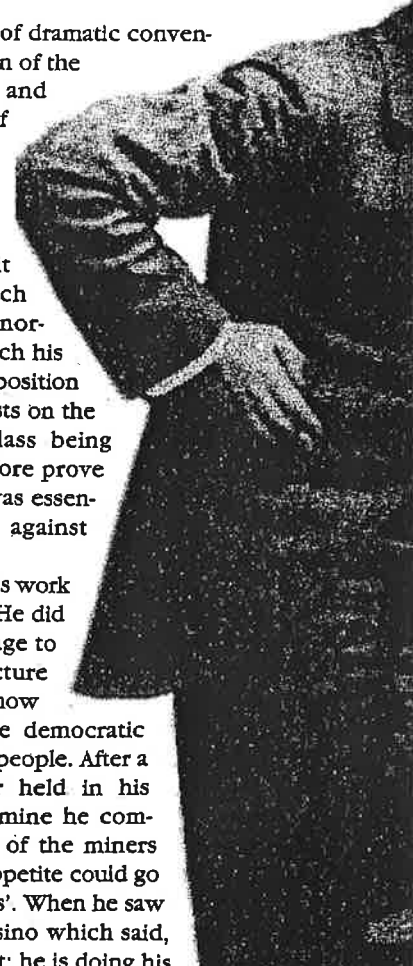
One of the more breathtaking contradictions in Victorian society was that it preached the virtues of utility and morality—but for others. Its great aristocratic leaders led neither useful nor particularly moral lives. Therefore to live the life of idleness seriously was not only a kind of protest against the work ethic which exposed the hypocrisy at the heart of society. It was also a parody of aristocratic manners and pretensions. That is why the central character in Wilde's plays, his novel and his critical writings is so often someone who has the means to experience the pleasures of art that not having to work for a living allows but who can use the detachment which this privileged freedom gives them to fire darts at Victorian society.

Again and again, these darts hit their target. In *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) Lord Illingworth sums up the landed aristocracy and their fox hunting culture in a devastating phrase. They are, he says, 'the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable'. He also mocks the claims of politicians to sympathise with the sufferings of the poor. To the character who says that the East End is a very important problem, he replies, 'Quite so. It is the problem of slavery. And we are trying to solve it by amusing the slaves.'

In *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) the ruling class targets require no detached observer to expose them to mockery. They do it themselves. Lady Bracknell, who is firmly attached to the status quo, profoundly approves of a central character's ignorance, which she sees as a very desirable characteristic for society as a whole. 'The whole theory of modern education', she pronounces, 'is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square.'

The plays, for all their use of dramatic conventions, bring out the corruption of the ruling class, its hypocrisy and oppressive treatment of women. This witty exposure of the ruling class comes with an aristocratic drawl. That doesn't make it any the less effective but it points to a question which Wilde is often accused of ignoring. The life of idleness, which his champions of art flaunt in opposition to the dominant ideology, rests on the same class basis as the class being mocked. Doesn't that therefore prove that Wilde's revolt into art was essentially an elitist reaction against society?

No careful reading of Wilde's work as a whole will support this. He did not timidly restrict his message to the chosen few. He did a lecture tour of the US and his letters show warmth and respect for the democratic values of the republic and its people. After a somewhat alcoholic dinner held in his honour at the bottom of a mine he commented on 'the amazement of the miners when they saw that art and appetite could go hand in hand knew no bounds'. When he saw a notice over a piano in a casino which said, 'Please don't shoot the pianist; he is doing his



best,' he wrote that, 'I was struck with this recognition of the fact that bad art merits the penalty of death, and I felt that in this remote city, where the aesthetic applications of the revolver were clearly established in the case of music, my apostolic task would be much simplified, as indeed it was.'

Throughout his career Wilde engaged with social issues. His first play was a sympathetic treatment of Russian terrorists. He defended Irish independence under difficult circumstances, as when Lord Cavendish—a family acquaintance—was murdered by terrorists in Phoenix Park, Dublin. 'When liberty comes with hands dabbled in blood it is hard to shake hands with her' was his first reaction. But he added, 'We forget how much England is to blame. She is reaping the fruit of seven centuries of injustice.' None of this suggests that Wilde recoiled from contact with ordinary life or with the political issues of the day. Even more importantly this concern with the nature of society modified his approach to art. He began to see that there can be no placing supreme value in art without the most profound change in social relations. Indeed, simply to be an aesthete is to deny the value of art itself.

Signs of this discontent are evident in what is often assumed to be his manifesto for aestheticism, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1890). In this novel the worship of aesthetic feeling by the hero, Dorian, leads to disaster for those he loves. By turning himself into a timeless art object (while his portrait, hidden in the attic, ages) he makes himself into a monster. His self-murder at the end (he stabs his portrait) is a recognition of the limitations of what the individual can do in our kind of society.

In his essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891) Wilde spells out an alternative for the individual. For the individual truly to flourish (and therefore realise the value of art) there has to be the abolition of private property and the creation of a non-authoritarian socialist society.

Critics sometimes argue that Wilde's interest in socialism is superficial or that he is merely imitating arguments put forward by other

socialists of the period whom he knew, like his fellow Irishman George Bernard Shaw.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In his essay, we come across some familiar Wildean paradoxes about the virtues of selfishness and the vices of altruism. What is wrong with altruism — or charity — is that it depends on a rotten system: 'It is immoral to use private property to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property. It is both immoral and unfair.' Worse than that, it demoralises the recipients:

'We are often told that the poor are grateful for charity. Some of them are, no doubt, but the best amongst the poor are never grateful. They are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so. Charity they feel to be a ridiculously inadequate mode of partial restitution, or a sentimental dole, usually accompanied by some impertinent attempt on the part of the sentimentalist to tyrannise over their private lives. Why should they be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table? They should be seated at the board, and are beginning to know it.'

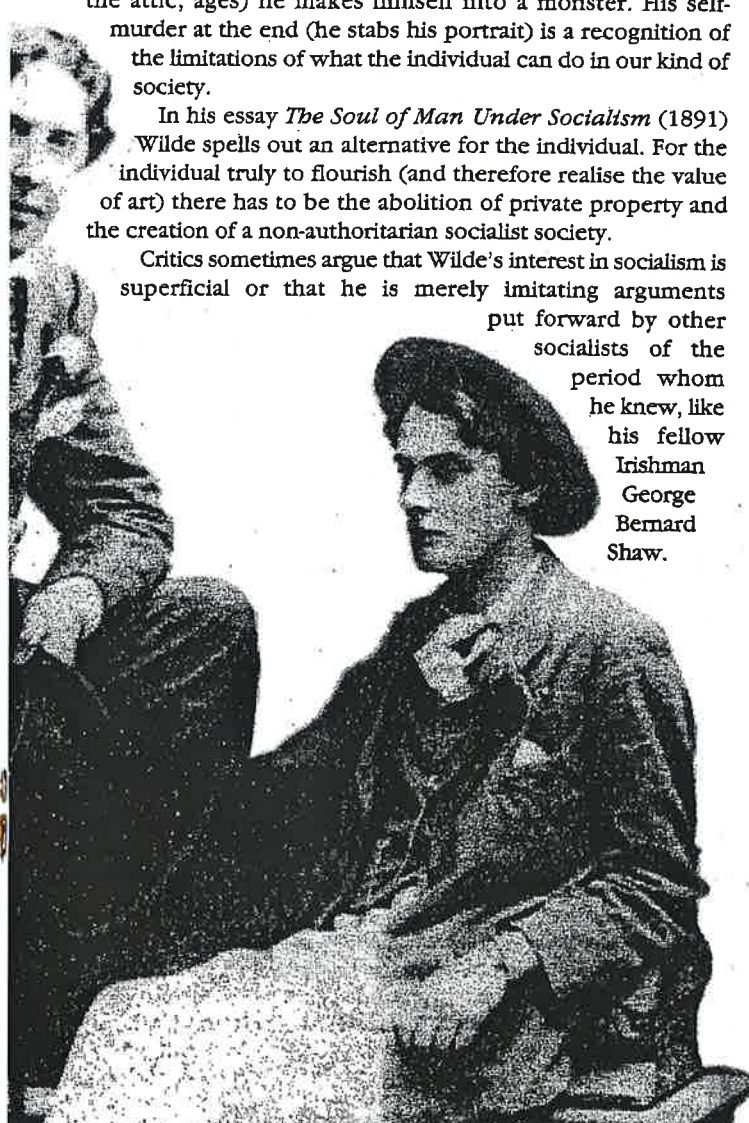
Wilde goes on to praise disobedience and rebellion as the way in which progress has been made and expresses amazement that anyone should put up with their condition. He agrees that agitators are 'interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is why', he continues, 'they are so absolutely necessary.' What he finds most tragic about the French Revolution is 'not that Marie Antoinette was killed for being a queen, but that the starved peasant of the Vendée voluntarily went out to die for the hideous cause of feudalism'.

He does not repeat the mistake of Shaw and other Fabians and see socialism as a top down system of government. On the contrary, the conversion of private property into public wealth must bring about the freest possible development of every individual. 'Private property has crushed true individualism and set up an individualism that is false. It has debarred one part of the community from being individual by starving' and it has distorted whatever individualism is possible as a result of some being relieved of poverty. 'The individual is to make what is beautiful.' So who, it might be asked, will do the dirty jobs? Wilde's socialism is here an advance over Morris's, who still hankered after the dignity of labour in a pre-mechanical age. 'There is nothing necessarily dignified', he states bluntly, 'about manual labour at all, and most of it is absolutely degrading. It is mentally and morally injurious to man to do anything in which he does not find pleasure... Man is made for something better than disturbing dirt. All work of that kind should be done by a machine.'

Wilde was aware that under private property human beings are slaves to the machine and that the consequence of a machine being able to do the job of 500 men is mass unemployment. 'Were that machine the property of all, everybody would benefit by it... At present machinery competes against man. Under proper conditions machinery will serve man.'

Is this utopian? Wilde answers his own question. 'A map of the world that does not include utopia is not even worth glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which humanity is always landing. And when humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of utopias.'

No wonder Wilde had to be crucified. Not only did he turn his wit on society, he argued that there was a need for a different kind of society. This was not art for art's sake. It was art for a new kind of human personality. Wilde's tragedy is that he fought his battle within the very social institutions he despised — up to and including the law court where he attempted to turn the trial into a satire on his persecutors. He could not win that battle on his own. We ought to remember Wilde not as a gay icon, an early exponent of camp, but as a rebel who made the case for socialism all the more effective by his devotion to art.



RED WORDS

The Writing on the Wall" A Different Reading of Graffiti

Presented as "vandalism" and "anti-social" by the mainstream media, graffiti is associated with clichéd ideas about social decay, troubled teens and general "immorality."

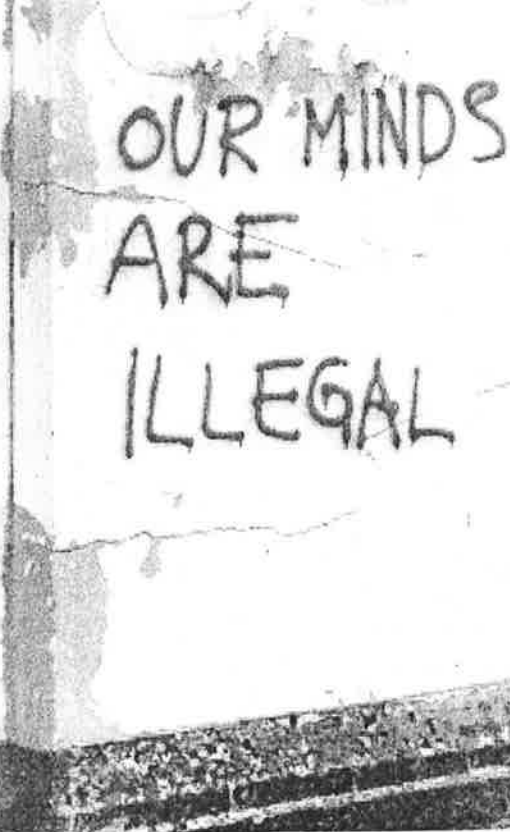
Slaven Kljucanin presents a different reading of graffiti, recognising it as at once the most visible expression of alienation as well as the most democratic form of artistic expression possible.

The art of graffiti is present and visible everywhere, and has been since ancient times. Although often omitted from mainstream histories of art, graffiti is, in many ways, the first human social gesture to lie outside of a pure concern for survival. The first drawings archaeologists have discovered are found in the caves of France and Spain and date from the Stone Age. In later periods the invention and development of writing has of course had an enormous influence on the historical development of graffiti. Written examples of graffiti have been found in the ruins of Athens and Pompeii, indicating the widespread appeal this form of expression had across both literate and illiterate class groups.

Today, the most important factor influencing the production of graffiti is that its creators - the modern graffiti artists - are conscious of the wall as a medium. The public street is arguably the most democratic of forums. It is one that is open as a media tool for all the groups oppressed and marginalised by capitalist society. As one Melbourne

graffiti artist put it, "The streets are public places. Graffiti is an expression of the experiences and ideas of people who live on those streets but don't own them or the houses or the businesses. Graffiti creates solidarity between all those people. It isn't academic; it's immediate and doesn't require money."

One of the consequences of the revolutionary upheaval in France in 1968 was the rapid increase in the popularity of graffiti and its occurrence. A Marxist theorist at the time cited graffiti as being the true revolutionary medium to express "the spirit of



OUR MINDS
ARE
ILLEGAL

'68." It is this revolutionary aspect to modern graffiti as an artistic and expressive form that can help us understand why authorities are so opposed to it. The reason for

this is very simple. Graffiti is extremely difficult to censor, police or control and is therefore one of the most honest of media, unpolluted by the standard contingencies of capitalism: funding, markets, state approval and the like. Graffiti as a form recognises no constraints, is free from both censorship and authorial control. Once it has been created graffiti can easily be added to or destroyed by other artists. Its fundamentally basic and flexible nature ensures its popularity amongst the oppressed groups - particularly working class youth - in the stifling environment of capitalism. Graffiti artists constantly develop new ways of informing (annoying) the whitewashed walls of capitalist establishment.

Graffiti is a very simple and easily understood response to the alienation caused by an existence living in a system arranged around profit instead of human needs and desires. It is a cry against the cultural manipulation, economic absurdity and environmental decay which dominate modern life.

In the words of one Melbourne artist, "Graffiti cheers me up. I've often laughed at it and felt that I'm not alone, and that's important for our emotional survival." The ideologies of capitalism are the real vandalistic assaults on the human spirit, not the graffiti which notes their own cruel nonsense and absurdity. Please, think twice before accepting their distinction and look again at those statements which can truly be called "our" art. ■

RED WORDS

KING DREAMS

The Supreme Court Declares
that Black Children are human
Rosa Parks sits at the
front of the bus
King dreams
dreams of the end of the night
King dreams
dreams of the Montgomery Bus
boycott
of ending the back of the bus
for black people
King dreams a nightmare
his home is bombed
with his wife and children
in the next room

King prays
I Am I Am tells him I can't
protect you but I will be
there
with you always
Birmingham Sunday
Black Children are blown
into the night
King marches marches
in Selma Alabama and
Mississippi
for the right to vote
King dreams
dreams of economic
equality
of social democracy
King dreams of a poor

people's March
on Washington
King frightens
frightens capitalism
King marches
in Memphis
Tennessee
for rubbish collectors
King frightens
capitalism
King dies in
Memphis
But King's dream
remains alive
where ever
people dream
dream of equality

"KING DREAMS" was
performed by *Marvin
Hubbard* at this year's May
Day celebration held at the
Gresham Hotel in Dunedin.
Marvin played an active
role in the American civil
rights' movement of the
1960s, as well as the
student occupations
of the time.

Marge Piercy is a well known American novelist and poet who is described in the *Oxford companion to twentieth century poetry in English* as a "Marxist, feminist and activist." In her novel - *Braided Lives* (p. 403) - she makes an interesting observation:

"I was taught to distance myself from my work. To write with a tiny part of my intellectual and emotional equipment. I was taught to see poems as complicated intellectual constructions full of carefully layered ambiguities, ironies and ironically treated myths, alluding in a complex web to other similar works. But you can write about fucking, you can write about supermarkets, you can write about the Bomb. You can write your politics. You can actually write poems that say what you feel and

T H I N K . "

You've stolen my earth but you can't steal the skies -
they're just a small shaft up above, where my eyes
can catch the light -
between bars

pressed by heavy walls.

But it's enough,
seeing just that blessed, blissful blue
which the day dawns through to me,
sending down with it - sometimes -
lost bird song.
But it's enough
for me - this jackdaw, black & happily blithering
(O true friend of these jail days) -
to see him in flight, free
amongst the changing pictures of travelling clouds.

And it's just a small shaft - from darkest night
appears the brightest stars in this confinement.
The brightest star of the firmament appears
and shines from the vast distance of space.

The world own light - brighter, hotter,
better - fills from this shaft my cell
just as it shines on you outside -
and it is red-hot rejection he hurls back.

You've stolen my earth but you can't steal the
skies,
they're just a small shaft up above, narrow,
between bars,

pressed by heavy walls.

The sky! My body's sense is soaring
skyward with a spirit free, far more free
than you who wait outside, wait foolishly
for these frail shackles, this prison
to destroy me.

Karl Liebknecht was a comrade
of Rosa Luxemburg, and was
instrumental in founding with
her the German Communist
Party (KPD) and leading the
second wave of the German
revolution. He was one of the
only Social Democratic
parliamentarians to vote against
the First World War, and spent
much of it in jail for sedition. This
poem was composed while he
was in jail during June 1916.

New translation from the
German by Dougal McNeill

"From
Prison"
by Karl
Liebknecht



Socialism and the struggle for women's liberation

In a poll conducted on the BBC Website last year, Karl Marx was voted "thinker of the millennium." We agree. It was, after all, Marx who uncovered the workings of human history, who provided the most thorough critique of capitalism and who identified the working class as the force which could create a new, classless society.

But one of Marxism's major contributions to the fight for human liberation usually goes unrecognised: its analysis of women's oppression.

The ideas of Marx and Friedrich Engels on the "woman question" were published in Engels' *The origins of the family, private property and the state*, which provided the first – and still unrivalled – theoretical framework for understanding women's oppression in capitalist society.

Unlike the Utopian socialists who preceded them (or feminists then and now), Marx and Engels located women's oppression firmly in the real, material conditions of society, and not in "human nature" or the ideas in people's heads.

Women's liberation, like human liberation generally, could only be achieved through practical action to change social structures, not simply by "educating" people to behave better.

Marx and Engels argued that women's oppression was a

**Tess Lee Ack from Socialist
Alternative in Australia
argues that one of
Marxism's most important
contributions – its analysis
of women's oppression –
has gone largely
unrecognised**

product of class society and the development of private property. In pre-class societies, the absence of a surplus and the need to survive imposed a certain egalitarianism (what Marx and Engels called "primitive communism").

However, once ownership and inheritance of property became an issue, the "mother right" (tracing descent through the mother) was overthrown. Engels called this, "the world historical defeat of the female sex", when "the man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of his children."

Thus class society gave rise to two key aspects of women's oppression: economic inequality, and the sexual double standard which condemned women to monogamy or celibacy.

Class society also meant that not all women had common interests. Like men, they were divided along class lines, with a minority (of both sexes) at the top benefiting from the exploitation and oppression of the vast majority (of both sexes) below.

Different class societies (slavery, feudalism, capitalism) have produced different types of family, moulded to suit the needs of the ruling class. In the early years of capitalism, when women and children provided much of the labour in the new factories, it seemed that the working class family would die out.

But the more farsighted capitalists realised that premature deaths and high infant mortality rates among the working class threatened their profits in the longer term. Moreover, it wasn't just a question of reproducing the next generation of workers, they also needed to be reasonably healthy and disciplined to accept their subordinate role in society and the rule of the bosses.

The solution? Privatised the reproduction of the workforce in the home and make the women do the work for free – and sell this unpaid labour to them as their "natural" and major role in life. The "natural" order of the modern nuclear family led to rigid stereotypes of "appropriate" behaviour for women and men, including sexual behaviour.

This is why Marx and Engels, as early as *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), called for "the abolition of the family." Along with abolition of all private property, this was the precondition to ending women's status as mere "instruments of production."

Of course, women have always remained in the workforce. But establishing the idea of women's main role as wife and mother had other benefits for the capitalists: women became a "cheap" section of the workforce, and this acted to drag down wages and conditions for the whole working class.

This in turn creates divisions and segmentation within the working class and acts as a barrier to the unity that is essential if workers are to successfully resist and overthrow the ruling class.

Marx and Engels welcomed the participation of women in the workforce alongside men and insisted that they should be organised as an integral part of the workers' movement.

Only then could women fight alongside men on an equal basis and achieve their own emancipation. Liberation, by definition, cannot be handed down – *it must be*

won. As Marx famously said, "The emancipation of the working classes can only be conquered by the working classes themselves." The same applies to women.

Women and men, united in struggle against a common class enemy, can overcome sexist ideas. This is evident every time workers challenge capitalist rule, whether on the smaller scale of a strike or at the heights of a revolution.

The Russian revolution of October 1917 introduced rights for women then unheard of in the rest of the world (and in total unmatched even today). Not just the right to vote, but equal pay, equal opportunity in jobs and education, free abortion and contraception, free maternity care, paid maternity leave and free childcare, easy civil marriage and divorce and so on.

Marxism's great achievement was to recognise that sexist ideas flow from women's position in class society. So only by getting rid of the material basis of their oppression – their unpaid labour in the home and consequent economic inequality – can women become truly free.

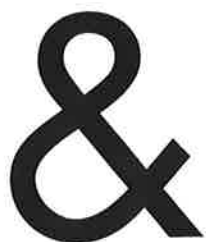
The Russian revolution made a start. But tragically Russia was too poor and economically backward to complete the project of socialising housework and childcare. In the 1920s came Stalin's counter revolution when women, and the working class generally, lost these improvements.

The upsurge of class struggle in the 1960s and '70s also saw the birth of movements against oppression and a series of struggles against sexism, racism and homophobia. Out of these struggles, great gains were made, at least in the more advanced industrial societies. Young women of today have far more rights and opportunities than their mothers and grandmothers.

But we are still far from being liberated. And many of the gains are enjoyed only by a minority of women. Many feminists today have essentially given up on liberation, aspiring only to equal rights with men within the framework of an exploitative capitalist society. For working class women, that doesn't offer much.

Marxism, ultimately, is about human liberation. It's about the fundamental transformation of every aspect of society, not about winning a few reforms that benefit a minority. And that's why anyone who wants to fight for women's liberation should be a Marxist. ■

Sexuality



Sexuality remains one of those subjects which liberal society refuses to discuss honestly or sensibly. Alternately demonised as an indescribable evil by the Christian right, marginalised into pseudoscientific biological determinism by liberals or reduced to a commodified absurdity in the knit-yourself-an-orgasm pages of Cosmo magazine, sexuality is one of the most widely written on – and most misunderstood – of topics. The following article is taken from a talk Emma Weston gave to the Dunedin branch of the International Socialist Organisation in May this year.

Socialism

Human sexuality is determined not merely biologically, but is shaped by the overall social, economic and political organisation of society. On an individual level a person's sexuality is evolved through childhood conditioning in addition to personal preferences and emotions. In other words, sexuality rests in the mind as well as in the body.

Maurice Godelier wrote once that, "It is not sexuality which haunts society, but society which haunts... sexuality." Socially conditioned views on morality, gender roles and "normal" sexuality, whether we conform to these standards or rebel against them, are part of the baggage we bring to sex. In her book *Straight sex: the politics of pleasure*, Lynne Segal writes, "If we are to assess the prospects for greater sexual agency, we will need to consider changes in the broader context, and forces out of which our gender and sexual identities are made and remade, always precariously, through conflict, envy and struggle."

Analysing the greater social context and the historical development of social attitudes to sex, we realise the context from which our daily lives are affected by wider issues and the kind of society that needs to be created in order to allow more genuinely liberated sexualities to flourish.

The "Sixties" can be viewed as a step in the direction of liberation from the relative moral and religious conservatism that dominated the era preceding it. The development of the contraceptive pill provided women with the freedom to have sex without the worry of unwanted pregnancy, thus opening the way for sex to become a medium of pure pleasure. That is, rather than being simply a function of the marriage relationship for the purpose of reproduction, people could begin to have sex for the

fun of it. Women were now free to have sex without the complications of unwanted babies or equally unwanted marriages. But liberated sex was not the automatic result of this. For, although contraception and access to abortion played an essential role and created the material conditions which made liberation begin to be possible, society still had far to go in its views of sexuality and gender roles.

Segal wrote of her generation at this time that, "We moved on from seeing sex as liberation to seeking liberated sex." The construction of sex, then and now, is characterised by three standardising factors: heterosexual relations between a woman and a man; gender roles in which the woman is passive and the man active; and an emphasis on intercourse – "missionary position" penetration of the penis into the vagina.

Practices outside the conventional were condemned as deviant by the forces of both Christian Churches and the right, in the sixties as now. Churches viewed non-reproductive sex as a sin, and worse still with sex for pleasure. Only sex which women enjoyed could be more sinful.

Emphasis is placed on the role of women as submissive to male dominance. Sex is an act which should happen within a marriage relationship, viewed as a gift for reproduction. In the 1960s just as today, Christian fundamentalists advocated the use of sex merely as a tool for the creation of babies.

The list of forbidden and/or sinful practices condemned and discouraged by various Churches is long: sex outside marriage, homosexuality, oral sex, for Roman Catholicism the use of contraception, the list goes on. The final aim of these sorts of morality was a boring form of procreational (reproductive) sex, typically in the missionary position which hopefully results in babies, and lots of them.

For women before the invention of the Pill sex was therefore

inextricably linked to pregnancy, birth, feeding children, running around after children, children and children...

Sexual Freedom?

The Pill created new sexual opportunities for women free from the burden of babies, and the three notions of sex I mentioned earlier found themselves challenged. Feminists challenged in particular women's passive and submissive role in the sexual act. If sex could be transformed into a medium of pleasure and not purely of reproduction then sex could, and should, take on forms women enjoyed. Procreative sex had determined the necessity of a male aroused and with an erect penis, just as it dictated the necessity of male orgasm and ejaculation in order to create the possibility of pregnancy. The implications of this sort of "biological" sex were that it began and ended with the male and the male's pleasure. But if sex could be for pleasure rather than the sole purpose of making babies then this no longer had to be the case. In the context of traditional heterosexual intercourse women had not been getting their share of satisfaction. The Pill meant possibilities of sex for pleasure; and pleasure, finally, for women.

Feminists emphasise the similarity of the clitoris and penis in the orgasm, and began in the sixties to attempt to provide women with more knowledge and awareness of their own clitoris and sexualness in the hope that they might learn to pleasure themselves. One feminist commented, "Orgasm is not something done to us but something we do."

Segal writes on the notion of gender roles which feminists began to challenge and are challenging still, "The highly contested notions of 'gender' and 'sexuality' are at present conceptually independent. They are held together by cultural imperatives, and practices of heterosexism definitively linked 'the masculine' to activity and dominance, and 'the feminine' to sexual passiveness and subordination. They are nevertheless potentially and frequently actually unstable."

Alternatives?

Alternatives presented to sexual intercourse as the mode of sex included emphasis on masturbation, sensuality formerly derided as "foreplay", cunnilingus and additional activities that offered pleasure for women, and that emancipated sex from the penetration of penis into vagina.

Another force of opposition to these new

forms of sex has been the political right wing: the entrenched view of the nuclear family, with a man as breadwinner and head of the household, while women provided a free, skilled labour force of child carers, cleaners and cooks. When women moved into the paid workforce alongside men, the right encouraged men to feel as if they had been robbed of their power and masculinity. When capitalism unleashes one of its periodic crises – as happened in the late 1980s – women workers were made scapegoats.

Right-Wing Sexism

The right fumed they should return to their "natural" roles as married mothers and housewives – submissive in their home, submissive in bed, submissive in politics. Similarly, with the advent of AIDS, the homosexual community became the target for blame, revealing the extent to which the sexual is made political. The right saw lowering moral (read sexual) standards as the cause of most of the problems of the world.

Poor economies were the result of promiscuous single mothers bludging off an indulgent state. Unemployment the result of feminists "forcing" women into the work force. AIDS a punishment visited on the gay community. The right wing's answer was a return to traditional moral standards and the heterosexual nuclear family, but their project was – and is – doomed. The invention of the Pill and changes in the structure of the capitalist economy had encouraged a change in women's consciousness which could not be reversed. Once the Pandora's Box of sexuality had found material conditions which allowed it to be opened, people found it harder and harder to fit easily into those tired old boxes: that men would be sexually "in charge" and dominant all the time, women passive, and that heterosexuals would be 100 per cent attracted to the opposite sex and never to the same sex. Eve Kosofsky refutes these standard oppositions and addresses the character of individual sexuality in the truism, "people are different from one another."

The preferences of any aspect of a person's sexuality, their sexual orientation, their turn-ons, their enjoyment level, their fetishes and any other aspect of a person's sexuality is met by this quote. The traditional constructs – traditional insofar as bourgeois values are presented as beyond question and unchanging over time, "natural" and "human nature" – become ridiculous in this light simply

because people are indeed different from one another. In a world where sex is a medium of pleasure and people are different from one another, then logically there should be a diversity of sexual practice.

Sexual Repression

Unfortunately, in the society we live in today, people are still not liberated in their sexuality. Liberation of any variety, let alone sexual, is impossible in a world characterised by the stigmatisation and oppression of different races, gender, sexual orientations and sexuality. In capitalist society sexuality is reduced, like all other aspects of human interaction, to its cash value, it is commodified. Sex is reduced to a thing, a product. In a society where money and profit take precedence over people, liberated sex can never take place.

It is reduced like all aspects of human relationships to the need of an uncaring and impersonal system. Sex is a political issue. Even talking about liberating sex challenges some of the key ideas central to capitalist society. Right wing politicians become the champions of certain sexualities, the scourges of others.

The sexuality of individuals in society are far more blurred and diverse than the ideologies which govern society dare concede. Power relations see-saw between activity and passivity, and similarly sexual attraction cannot be seen as a black and white process. But according to the social construction of this world under capitalism, a single sexuality is advocated for political reasons. That sexuality is heterosexual relations in the context of marriage, with an active male and a subordinate female. Gay men remain "faggots", lesbians "dykes", passive men "wimps" and dominant women "butch." These are the necessities of capitalism. We cannot liberate ourselves without first identifying and fighting this tyranny's cause – the rotten system of capitalism.

It is only in a world free from oppression, in other words a world where the root cause of oppression – capitalism – has been removed, that more truly liberated human sexualities can begin to flourish. This would be a world where no narrow ideas about "sexuality" would be presented as the only natural and healthy form when in fact it merely suits economic agendas. Let us not just dream of this world of liberated and liberating sex. We can and we must work for creating the world where these dreams can be turned into realities. ■

Alienation

You don't have to be a Marxist to notice that most people don't like Mondays. Work, "that toad" which dominates and defines modern existence, is almost universally deplored and disliked. We wait for the weekend and dream of retirement while spending most of our lives doing things we don't like, for people we don't like, at a place we don't like. Despair, depression, general boredom and absurdity seem to characterise the fabric of all aspects of modern life – not just those of the work force – and a sense of foreignness, of strangeness and disconnection from others is one which is not foreign to all too many people. Karl Marx recognised that this state came to a large degree from the way our lives were ordered – how work and labour, and thus the main part of our existence, were organised.

For Marx, alienation began with how labour was organised. He saw economic alienation inherent in how capitalism organised itself, with a boss employing someone by paying them in exchange for a set amount of their time. This exchange produces a very practical alienation, that of the producer from what they produce, which becomes – along with its destination – an irrelevancy. Thus a cafe worker can spend all day making coffees and go home in the evening to a house without even a plunger. "Work" and its end products are disconnected from one another. Similarly, when the employer pays a wage another form of alienation is taking place. This very work, the end product of which is no longer our own, becomes itself quite foreign. The ownership of our own labour passes to the person paying for it.

This situation leads to other implications. Divorced from the rest of our lives and no longer connected to the thing it is producing or the person who produces it, work becomes something imposed by others, a dull chore which cannot satisfy our own needs but serves instead only those needs of the activity itself. Workers become cogs in a big machine – depersonalised and dehumanised. Working a checkout, serving at McDonalds, telemarketing, or any of the other tasks which dominate society confirms this sense in most people.

Work dominates our lives, and so the way it is arranged and organised tends to end up being mirrored by the other aspects of our lives. Being subjected to the sort of machine like routine of a working day which is focused around selling your time to another does not produce an alienation that begins and ends in this timeframe. Rather, this same sense begins to affect all

The vocabulary of socialism can seem to those not familiar with it almost incomprehensible, but this is not because the ideas themselves are difficult to understand. Rather, it is because they are so dangerous to the current order that they are not taught or explained in the mainstream like other aspects of our intellectual world. The classical Marxist tradition offers a comprehensive explanation of a complex and dynamic system – capitalism – and therefore must itself offer complex and dynamic explanations. These ideas can be explained quite easily because they impact directly on our lives – they "ring true." And these terms and descriptions are not only of academic interest: the point of understanding the world, as Marx put it, is to change it. In the first of a regular series, "Ideas we need to understand the world and fight for change", Dougal McNeill looks at three ideas we can use to change the world – alienation, exploitation and crisis.

aspects of life just as the situation which creates it orders all these aspects. Selling labour stifles human freedom and creativity to the tyranny of the timesheet. The final aspect of Marx's analysis is this self alienation – by becoming distanced from the results and processes of our labour we at the same time become distanced from our own potential and our own opportunities for expression and

"Ideas we need to understand the world and fight for change"

development. As Milan Kangrga put it, "To be alienated from history as human praxis and a human product."

Surviving under capitalism involves abandoning what makes us fully human. Everyone must work to live, yet the way we work involves abandoning that very sense of power which makes us feel fully alive. This is an idea echoed in the "Happy Hours" across the country. Happy indeed for the release from spirit numbing dissatisfaction into relaxation and the frustration numbing drug of alcohol. The drug abuse, depression and suicide statistics which are all so alarmingly high in New Zealand are a devastating indictment of the capitalist system.

When Marx wrote about alienation from oneself he was not, as some humanists stupidly suggest, suggesting some sort of

mystical "human nature." "Alienation" is not meant to be an impossible to understand term. Rather, it is the recognition of how structures of capitalism create the potential for human creativity and capacities for freedom while at the same time making them unachievable and impossible.

Marx did not analyse alienation just to depress us all. Evidence of it exists merely in the observation of our own lives, after all. What Marx recognised was that denying this reality by retreats into sentimentality or blind optimism would just make it worse. By looking at the root cause of a society as alienated as our own – the way capitalism organises labour – we can focus on the enemies of our own satisfaction and creativity. We can use this knowledge as a tool to fight for change. To understand why these states are the case, however, we must turn now to exploitation and crisis.

Exploitation

The liberal theorist would have us believe that discussions of alienation like the one above are misguided and foolish. After all, hasn't humanity been divided from itself since the beginning of time? And the nonsense about "the organisation of labour", scoffs our liberal friend, isn't that just a mean spirited way of describing something quite fair – the exchange of one thing for another? The worker gets a fair wage in exchange for a fair day's work. Nothing can be fairer than that, right?

Wrong. Exploitation, far from being the exception employers and reformist union bureaucrats would have you believe, is an essential part of capitalism. Marx recognised this, and began his exploration of it through an analysis of "commodity

for under capitalism capital – things or cash – and labour power are both “commodities”, things made for exchange.

Commodities can be nuclear arsenals or deodorant sticks, rubber kiwis or Mazda cars, any number of a variety of things. What all commodities share in common is that they can all (through money) be exchanged for one another. This is possible only because commodities have the common property of having been produced by a definite amount of human labour time. The value of a particular commodity is determined by the amount of labour time a society has to spend on producing it. This is what Marx calls the “socially necessary labour time”, and can be illustrated by comparing price tags in a “\$2 Shop” and those of a luxury gift shop.

With this in mind, apply this idea of value to labour power itself. The value of labour is also determined by the amount of labour time needed to produce it – that is, what it takes to feed, clothe, house, educate and reproduce the worker. A worker’s wages pay for these costs of “producing” their ability to work.

But labour power is different from all other commodities. It is creative. It produces more value than it takes to maintain itself. If it was not true that human labour produced more than it consumed there would have been no development in our productive forces; in other words, there would have been no history. But this “surplus” value goes to the employer and not the employee who made it.

So if a worker is paid \$350 by their employer for, say, 40 hours of work, (enough to support them for the week) he or she will produce \$350 of goods in, say, only 20 hours. The remaining 20 hours go straight to the capitalist’s profit as a form of unpaid labour. This is the hidden secret of capitalist exploitation. Beneath the apparent “fair” exchange, it is the source of all profit. For in those extra 20 hours – the figure will of course vary with the circumstances – the worker will produce another \$350 worth of goods for the capitalist. This is what Marx called “surplus value.” It is the capitalist’s profit.

As this example has shown, exploitation

is central to the wage labour system. In a class society such as our own, where a tiny group control the whole society’s means of producing goods and services, exploitation and alienation are necessities. This applies just as much to the “new” service industries. An increase in productivity at Village Rialto is the same as one at Watties. The only difference is in the appearance of cans and customers – the relation between worker and boss remains identical.

Marx’s theory of surplus value does more than prove that capitalism is based on exploitation. It also reveals the irreconcilable conflict of interests that lies

contracts; on the other side wage demands, strikes and the whole history of the trade union struggle.

The only solution to the conflict is for workers to go beyond struggle over the role of exploitation, and abolish it by seizing the means of production and ending the sale of labour power. “We created it – let’s take it over”, Patti Smith once sang, and the statement echoes in workers’ struggles. We have nothing to gain from a company’s success or growth. Instead of buying New Right nonsense about “teams” and joining together for “common interests” we need to recognise these for what they are – the theft of our labour. We make the value in those things we work with, whether through service or more traditional production lines. They are ours for the taking.

Crisis

Our liberal companion will probably have been spluttering indignantly throughout this call to revolution. After all, calling for a revolution is profaning those gods of Stability and Progress the liberal establishment would have us all prostrate ourselves before. But even the quickest glance at political or economic history reveals the fact – obvious enough to anyone other than the economist High Priests of Rogernomics – that capitalism is based around chaos, crisis and instability. Any plan for human liberation which attempts to work within a capitalist framework will eventually come up against this insurmountable obstacle.

Capitalism is a system of recurring economic crises. Throughout the 1980s and ‘90s we lived through one.

To the rulers of our society and their apologists – journalists, politicians, economists and the rest – the explanations for crises vary from the likely criminals of solo mothers and greedy unions all the way through to those convenient scapegoats of evil, the wharfies (bad), teachers (worse) and Asian immigrants (even worse).

What is clear is that in all of capitalism’s crises the working class, the vast majority of society, suffers the most. Unemployment remained high throughout the last decade,



Many times in history, ordinary people have become so sick of capitalism they have taken to the streets in massive numbers, gone on strike, and fought for a better society.

at the heart of the system and divides us into classes. Driven by competition, capitalists seek always to extend the unpaid labour time – the profit – they can extract from their workers. When the mainstream media tells you business growth and increases in profitability are good for all of us they mean the “us” which is that tiny minority of capitalists. Driven by human need, workers seek to reduce the amount of unpaid time squeezed out of them. So, on one side speed ups, productivity deals, wage cuts, individual

and mass unemployment on a scale previously inconceivable is now accepted even in times of recovery. The advent of casualised and part time work combined with disguised unemployment makes the problem far greater than the statistics reveal.

The Marxist explanation of unemployment starts from the fact that capitalist production is production for profit. Where the classical conception of exchange went from commodity to money to commodity, under capitalism the reverse of this is the case. Money purchases a commodity – the combination of capital and labour – for the purpose of making more money. Within this formula lies the origin of all crisis – where once an undesired commodity would simply remained unproduced, under capitalism it exists for its money value. As one writer puts it, "The possibility of crisis arises from the fact that the commodity may fail to complete this metamorphosis: it may fail to be sold." It follows from this that under capitalism people are only employed when their employment, directly or indirectly, assists the making of profits. When it ceases to do so they cease to be employed.

The key to the overall level of unemployment at any time is therefore the average rate of profit across industry as a whole. When the average rate of profit is high, as it was in New Zealand in the "Golden Weather" post war boom, then capitalists are keen to expand their operations, to invest, to launch new projects and to take on new labour. When the average rate of profit is low, capitalists are reluctant to invest. Old industries become out of date and uncompetitive for the lack of new processes and are forced to close. New industries fail to take their place. Unemployment rises.

Each of these situations creates a certain momentum of its own. When new workers are taken on they have more money to spend. Demand for goods increases and production rises to meet this demand. Still more workers are employed to raise production, and so on. On the other hand, when unemployment rises workers who find themselves on the dole have less to spend. Demand for goods falls, production falls and more workers are made redundant. There is a slump.

This all leads us to an overwhelming question: What makes the rate of profit high or low in the first place? What decides whether the economy is to surge skywards

in boom or slide towards recession. Two processes are at work, one cyclical and the other more long term. The cyclical process causes the system to alternate, more or less regularly, from boom to slump and back again. In the boom increased demand for labour enables workers to push up wages to the point where they begin to cut into profits. The rate of profit falls and the balloon of boom has been burst, sending it spiralling and spinning into slump. In a time of recession unemployment cuts the bargaining power of workers and wages fall until eventually the rate of profit is restored. The slump turns into boom and the whole process begins again, bruised and battered from the experience but still intact.

The second long term process is more fundamental. It is an "underlying tendency for the rate of profit to fall."

Because capitalism is competitive, each capitalist unit strives to produce as much as possible, to seize as large a share of the market as it can. But capitalism is also

exploitation of labour power, from the living "machines" of workers and not from the accumulated or dormant labour resting in machines. Therefore, as capitalists buy more and more machinery the amount of living labour becomes a proportionately smaller part of their outlay. We have seen this process in our so called "Computer Age", where new technologies have allowed one worker to perform the tasks of many, and companies such as Telecom have sacked up to three quarters of their workers.

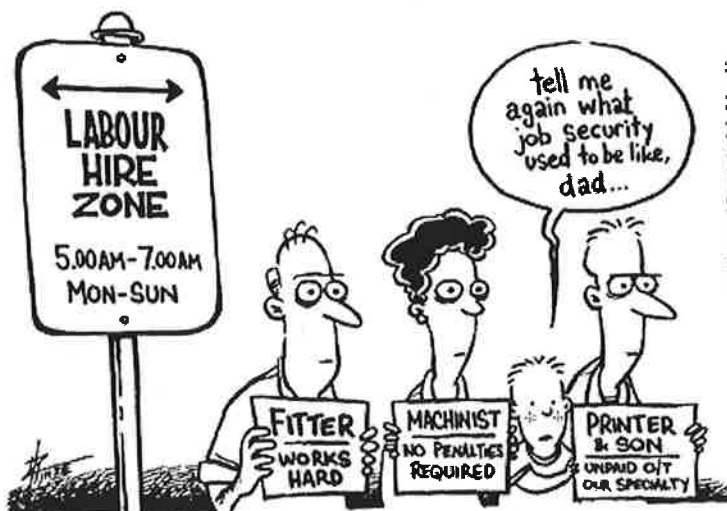
The result of this is that the rate of profit declines, despite the capitalists' attempts to counteract this by driving their workers to work harder and longer hours.

Once the rate of profit falls below a certain level, the incentive for capitalists to invest has gone and we have returned to another slump. Heightened unemployment, attacks on welfare, mass redundancies, and bankrupted firms are all examples of this.

Economic crisis in turn destroys a lot of capital by bankrupting weaker firms, thus making a higher rate of profit possible for the ones that survive. This explains why capitalism generally alternates between boom and slump. Sooner or later, however, the growth of a boom time ensures that the basic tendency for the rate of profit to fall reasserts itself. Each time this happens, as a result of capital's larger units and concentrated nature, the recession is worse and the recovery weaker. Capitalism finds it more and more difficult to use short, sharp crises to destroy sections of capital and to restore the rate of profit. Instead we have

a somewhat less sharp collapse but one which drags on and on without any hope of real recovery.

The tendency of the rate of profit to decline is a fundamental and unsolvable contradiction of capitalism. Social democrats who point to the Scandinavian Shangri-las of Sweden and Norway as examples of how capitalism can evolve into stable egalitarianism muddle reality. A state can disguise and muffle crisis – abundant North Sea oil and decades of dipping into the United States' Marshall Aid slush fund – but even they are part of the cycle, whether as victims or international exploiters, as recent attacks on the Swedish welfare state show. Mass unemployment is the result of contradictions built into the very core of capitalism, of a system based on the search for profit. Only when production is for human need, not profit, will we be free of economic crises and the untold misery they cause.



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exploitative, and so never pays workers enough for them to buy up all the goods they themselves produce. As a result, and because of the inversion of the traditional commodity-money-commodity cycle mentioned above, the system is faced with the constant danger of overproduction, of producing more than can be sold. This problem cannot be solved by wage increases because these would cut into profit. Instead, capitalists must continually re-invest their profits by producing ever more ways of producing, ever more "means of production" – more machines, and still more machines for making more machines. This solution works for so long as capitalists invest, something they continue to do only so long as it continues to result in profits.

However, it should become obvious that this investment in production only serves to deepen the extent of the wider crisis, and adds to profit's long term tendency to fall. Profit itself derives only from the

What will **socialism** be like?

We know the present system needs to be done away with, but exactly what would we put in its place?
Alex Callinicos answers some common questions about the shape and organisation
of a genuine socialist society

Won't a socialist revolution lead to **tyranny?**

This is probably the most basic objection to the idea of a socialist transformation of society. The whole experience of Stalinism – of despotic and exploitative regimes that called themselves socialist – has reinforced the idea that power tends to corrupt, that revolution will simply bring into being another form of oppression and exploitation.

To see why this is wrong, consider what Karl Marx, the founder of the revolutionary socialist tradition, meant by socialism. He described it as "the movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority." Socialist revolution would mean, he believed, not the abolition of democracy, but its radical extension.

Marx's model was the Paris Commune of 1871, where the standing army and police were abolished, and all officials were paid average workers' wages and made subject to regular election and immediate recall. Lenin, the main leader of the Russian revolution, saw in the *soviets*, or workers councils, which emerged during it, the beginnings of a new form of state where the majority producers themselves for the first time directly exercised political power.

So Marx and Lenin viewed socialism as the transformation of society from below. From this standpoint, Stalinism amounted, not even to a deformed version of socialism, but a counter revolution, the destruction of everything the original revolution stood for. We have always called the USSR and its like *state capitalist* countries, in which the working class were as exploited as they were in the West.

The fundamental cause of the Stalinist counter revolution was the fact that the original workers' revolution in Russia didn't spread to other, more advanced countries. The revolutionary regime was subjected to a blockade by the Western capitalist powers which devastated the economy. The industrial working class, in any case a minority in a predominantly peasant country, disintegrated, and so the *soviets* became empty shells.

So the most important lesson of the Russian revolution is that, for socialist democracy to survive and to flourish, the revolution, even if it begins in a particular country, must spread across the globe.

But what would this socialist democracy be like? How would it differ from liberal democracy as it exists today under capitalism?

The most important difference is that democratic decision making would spread throughout the whole of the social body. Prevailing capitalist democracy separates political power, which is formally subjected to democratic rules, (even though they're often ignored or twisted in practice), and economic power, which is exercised by a small number of unelected bosses. This separation would go. The workplace would provide the basic unit of the new socialist democracy, electing delegates to local, regional, national and (as the revolution spreads) international congresses.

Representative democracy, first developed by the emerging capitalist class when it was still revolutionary, would thus be extended beyond the sphere of politics narrowly understood, as decisions about what and how to produce passed into the hands of elected delegates. It would also be strengthened, since these representatives would be subject to regular re-election and liable to instant recall, thus making them accountable in a way that MPs never are.

Democracy also requires open discussion and choices between genuine alternatives. Both are limited by the power of capital in contemporary society. Here again socialism would present an extension of democracy. Access to the media would not be restricted to those with the wealth to buy newspapers and television networks.

Freedom of debate, however, isn't effective without the ability to choose between political parties offering different programmes. A workers' state would, like any other state, have the right to defend itself against counter revolutionary forces seeking its overthrow. But any party willing to work peacefully within the framework of the new state would be free to compete for influence in the workers' councils and would be guaranteed access to the media.

It sounds as if your kind of socialism involves getting rid of the market. But surely everyone agrees that we can't do without the market?

A market economy is essentially a form of anarchy. Economic priorities aren't decided collectively, but are the outcome of the blind competition between different firms, each out to make as large amounts of profits as possible. This is an enormously wasteful economic system – look at the vast resources used to build office blocks that nobody wants. It's also a very dangerous setup, since uncontrolled competition is having a potentially catastrophic effect on the environment.

What socialism means economically is simply that we should collectively decide what uses to make of the available resources, and regularly monitor how these decisions are working out in practice. That's what planning amounts to. It's really straightforward common sense, and it's a symptom of the fact that capitalism is, as Marx put it, a "topsy-turvy world", that planning is pilloried as an unrealistic idea. In fact, lots of planning takes place within the framework of capitalism – big companies draw up quite long term plans about investment projects, for example – but this framework means that the planning is fragmented and disorganised. Moreover, decisions are imposed from above with the people directly affected having no say.

Socialist planning, by contrast, would be part of the extension of democracy mentioned earlier. So not simply would the big firms which dominate every modern economy be taken into public ownership, but the individual workplaces would be democratically managed by those working in them. The producers themselves would then have to co-ordinate their decisions. Those affected by a particular investment decision – producers, consumers, residents – would cooperate to find the outcome most consistent with all their interests. Rather than economic power flowing vertically from the top, as it does under capitalism, it would flow horizontally, between the different workplaces and industries, as the producers sought democratically to coordinate their activities. → (Ctd...)

Wouldn't abolishing the market deprive people of the incentive to work?

"...it is still a vision worth fighting for"

Marx had a very realistic view of how socialist society would develop. He believed that no society can come into existence without the appropriate material and social conditions. The new socialist society, as it emerged amid the ruins of capitalism, would be, he said, "In every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society, from whose womb it emerges."

It's easy enough to think of examples of these "birthmarks." All the racism, sexism, and individualism bred into people by capitalism wouldn't disappear overnight. It would take time, a lengthy process of transition, to overcome the inheritance of capitalism. So Marx distinguished between what he called "the higher and lower phases of communist society."

The first phase would be marked by the establishment of forms of socialist democracy and planning which we've already looked at. But it would still make concessions to the capitalist past. One of these would be the basis on which goods and services would be distributed to people. These would be allocated on the principle, "From each according to his [sic] capacity, to each according to his works."

People's claim to a share of the proceeds of society's labour would depend on what they themselves put in (unless, of course, they were too young or too old or too ill to work). Clearly this "contribution principle" would mark progress compared to capitalism, where the bosses and their hangers on live off the labour of others. But Marx believed that it still involved a degree of inequality that would be unacceptable in the long run. The more skilled workers would receive a higher income than the less skilled, while those with more dependants would find themselves worse off than those with fewer.

But, as the socialist society entrenched itself – above all thanks to the success of the revolution globally – it would become possible to move towards what Marx called "the higher phase of the communist society." This would be based on the principle, "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." It would require a change in people's attitude to work, which would have "become not only a means of life but life's prime want." People would work not just in order to survive but because they found the labour they performed fulfilling, and therefore were prepared to put into society whatever they could and receive in return what they needed.

This profound change in attitudes would depend on the transformation of labour itself during the transition to full communism. The introduction of workers' self management would have been part of a broader set of changes breaking down what Marx called "the antithesis between mental and physical labour." Workers would have ceased to be

mere cogs in the machine, learning instead how collectively to control their own labours. This transformation would depend on putting technology to new uses. For example, information technology would cease to be a way of increasing managerial control and sacking workers, and become an instrument of democracy.

The higher phase of communist society would also depend on reaching a sufficiently high level of material abundance. People would only be prepared to give to society freely if they were sure of having their basic needs met. Sometimes the idea of communist abundance is interpreted as meaning that people could have anything they wanted. It's easy to see that this requirement is physically impossible to achieve – what, for example, if I wanted the whole of London to myself?

More realistically, the abundance which full communism presupposes is of those goods and services required to meet people's basic needs – food, clothing, heating, light, education, transport, and health treatment. One way of detecting the approach of full communism is by the production of these goods and services in sufficiently large quantities that they can be supplied free. The closer society approaches to this point, the more the market withers and ceases to become relevant.

Communism would thus require the further development of the productive forces, the means of producing wealth for society. What makes socialism possible in the first place is the way in which capitalism itself expands these forces in some respects – above all, food production – scarcity is already abolished. People starve today, for example, not because there's not enough food but because they lack the money to buy it. Socialism will be able to deal with this quite quickly, but it will still have to develop the productive forces further before all basic needs could be met in abundance.

Plainly a balance would have to be struck between this requirement and the need to avoid further damage to the environment, and to begin to reverse the damage already caused. Socialist planning is the only framework in which these problems could be addressed, but undoubtedly difficult choices would sometimes have to be made between the priorities of economic growth and those of the long term survival of the human species.

But would this communist society involve treating everyone as the same, reducing people to a drab uniformity?

Absolutely not. Marx defined communism as "an association in which the free development

of each is the condition of the free development of all." The point of communism, in other words, is to allow all people to realise their own distinctive abilities. The communist society provides the framework in which this individual self development can be achieved.

Sometimes the pursuit of individual self-realisation would undoubtedly lead to conflict. People want different things and, given that the resources available would not be unlimited, sometimes all these wants couldn't be met simultaneously. The basic democratic mechanisms of free debate and majority decision making, which socialist revolution had extended throughout society, would still be needed to resolve these conflicts.

Nevertheless the fact that these conflicts would take place against the background of material abundance (at least in respect of basic needs) would take the edge off them. Engels predicted that the state would wither away under communism. The state, he argued, was in its essence a specialised apparatus of coercion – the army, police, courts, and prisons – existing to defend the interests of the exploiting minority. This would begin to change after the socialist revolution since state power would now be used by the exploited majority against the surviving capitalists.

But, as socialism triumphed worldwide and material abundance drew nearer, the need for organised coercion would diminish. The democratic mechanisms set in place by the revolution would assume a larger and larger role in resolving disagreements. A limited degree of coercion might still be needed from time to time where the odd individual or group wasn't prepared to respect majority decisions, but these cases could be expected to be exceptional and wouldn't require the kind of elaborate repressive apparatus beloved of class society.

For the most part, however, disagreement and debate wouldn't represent a problem for communist society but rather the motor force of its development.

Leon Trotsky imagined political parties being formed "over the question of a new gigantic canal, or the distribution of oases in the Sahara... over the regulation of the weather and the climate, over a new theatre over chemical hypotheses, over two competing tendencies in music, and over the best system of sports."

Far from being dull and uniform, this would be a society permeated by a ferment of creation, experiment and debate. It would have the dynamism and vitality of capitalism but would replace its anarchy and exploitation with democracy and co-operation.

This was the vision of the future which inspired Marx and later revolutionary socialists to sacrifice their lives to the struggle against capitalism. Today, in a world thronging with the horrors denounced by Marx 150 years ago, it is still a vision worth fighting for. ■

Unemployment

dole/doledrums/dole/doledrums/dole

Unemployment has plagued New Zealand for the last two decades, and now levels of five or six per cent unemployment are being accepted as improvements! Rae Sinclair explores some of the issues around both employment and joblessness, and presents some socialist explanations and solutions to the problem.

At the last protest march I was on I carried a placard which read "Blame the System, Not the Victim!" This slogan is a good one for cash-strapped organisations to use. It can be used in various situations, protesting anything from health or welfare cuts, the rising cost of education to the inadequacies of the justice system. It even has the right number of syllables to be a useful generic chant! It is a statement people can relate to because most people feel that they have been the victim of some system at some time.

But for socialists this slogan is more than a cost effective, multi purpose protesting tool, it is a basic analysis of our society. The system referred to is capitalism, and most of those who participate in it are its victims. Capitalism creates many victims and in numerous cases does so in a way which makes this victim be unfairly held responsible for their position.

The unemployed are a classic example of this, particularly in the New Right economic climate of New Zealand. If labour is bought and sold in the market, like everything else, then using a simple supply and demand model it is easy to see how a surplus of labour to demand brings down wages. So unemployment has its advantages for employers. Unemployment not only keeps wages down, it also encourages a stable work force. People are more likely to stay in jobs with low wages and poor conditions in times of high unemployment for the obvious reason that they fear becoming jobless themselves.

Times of high unemployment allow employers to offer not only lower wages but also poorer conditions, to employ more part time staff and to casualise their working structures, cutting worker benefits. High unemployment also creates what Marxists call a "reserve army of labour", allowing businesses to expand without having to greatly increase their costs.

It is clear that a relatively high level of unemployment serves the interests of the employers, or ruling class. It is equally clear, for precisely the same reasons, that unemployment does not serve the interests of the working class. Those who are out of work are certainly not prospering and neither are those stuck in jobs with poor pay and worse conditions. It is not a huge jump in logic to consider that, since employers benefit from unemployment, then they must attempt to maintain it at a relatively high level. The current state of affairs, instigated by the Employment Contracts Act and continued in the Employment Relations Bill, allows employers huge control in determining pay rates and conditions, and thus allowing the economy to expand while unemployment levels remain static or even increase.

Things like overtime, penal rates and holidays, which in the past were commonplace rights, are now – if they are anything at all – privileges. This means that instead of taking on new employees to do extra work, an employer's existing workers can simply be expected to work harder. Business can expand with labour costs kept to a minimum, with the threat of unemployment compelling people to work any hours required of them.

I could just about – just about – live with the idea of the ruling class using their huge amount of power to control the labour market like this, if they were up front about it. If they said, "Thanks very much, unemployed, we really need you to maintain tension in the labour market. Here's the dole and keep up the good work." But they don't! Exactly the opposite is the case. They blame the unemployed person for being unemployed.

The unemployed are not recognised as an unavoidable and integral part of capitalism's arrangement of the labour force and society, but are instead thought of as lazy, good for nothing bludgers who could get jobs if they just got off their butts and looked for ones.

We've all heard the talk. The worst part about this is that it is not just employers and their mouthpieces in the media who treat the unemployed with contempt. Often it is the working class as well. Because capitalism is based around the exploitation of workers, around the theft of their surplus

labour, it is vital for capitalism to develop a morality and mythology of work. If the working class were not presented at every turn with the idea that work, hard work, was morally good then it would be far easier to recognise – and tire of – exploitation.

Ideas that hard work is a reward in itself, that laziness is "ungodly" and suffering on earth is rewarded in "heaven" are presented to the working class at every turn to try and refute the evidence of exploitation and alienation. It follows, therefore, that anyone who does not work is immoral, or stupid. There is a huge amount of rhetoric around "the unemployed." Statistics are used to try and imply fault in the correlation between poverty, low education and unemployment. Implying that the low educated and poor are to blame for their positions ignores the fact that it is the capitalist system which creates this sort of poverty and traps people in its cycle.

So it seems that people have the choice to either go to work and be exploited or be unemployed and marginalised. This seems like no choice at all. I am sure many workers would agree with me that working can feel like being trapped in a giant prison with invisible bars. Life is spent at work, preparing for work or recovering from work, with very little time left in between for living a fulfilling life.

Work defines your identity – Joe Bloggs the plumber, Mary Smith the salesperson. Work determines your standing in the community, where you live, what sort of social life you can have and so on. What are the rewards you get from work? Some of us are lucky enough to have jobs we enjoy, where we feel that what we do is worthwhile and we enjoy the company of our colleagues, but most of us go to work in order to make enough money to maintain ourselves and spend the little bit left over on pleasures. We have no control over our workplaces, what we produce, our own labour. It can feel as if we have no control over our own lives.

This nasty state of affairs does not mean socialists want to see work itself abolished. Of course, in any society there will need to be labour. Socialism cannot get rid of the need to work, but it can radically change the way working is ordered and regarded within society. By changing from capitalism's aim – profit – to humanity's aim – need – socialism would immediately change the systems of production.

This will require workers controlling the means of this production. Where now there is capitalist individualism, teaching us to see ourselves and others as selfish, disconnected entities, collective control of the means of production will encourage collective consciousness, more akin to that of traditional hapu and iwi organisation, where each individual is regarded as a valued and integral part of a greater whole. Individual effort benefits the entire society which, in turn, benefits the individual. To achieve these sorts of goals we need to overthrow capitalism. This will not just change the nature of work. It will change the nature of not working. Unemployment is yet another symptom of the sickness called capitalism.

Without a market which needs a reserve army of labour, there is simply no cause for unemployment to exist. Need and fully democratic planning will determine the way that labour and distribution are organised, not the needs of a few to keep wages low. Unemployment at the moment often comes about as a result of drives for "efficiency", a process which usually means finding new ways of maximising profit. A socialist vision sees efficiency as being able to meet the needs of all people in the best possible way. Removing the parasite of profit removes both the phenomenon of unemployment and the situation which makes people feel like every year they are being forced to work harder and harder.

Right now this revolution seems a long way off, and we still have to go to work each day – so what can we do now to pave the way for radical changes in society? As I have mentioned earlier, changes in the methods of production bring with them changes in attitudes, and we can work on these now. Protest and political action build solidarity between workers and the unemployed.

Socialists, through magazines like this, meetings, talks at protests and even at the pub, can counter the lies of the bourgeois press which places the blame for unemployment with the jobless. We can work within our unions to stop them accepting the logic of the ruling class. Workers and unemployed fight far more effectively together than apart. We need to, because, as Marx wrote all those years ago, we have "a world to win." ■

Jock Barnes was one of New Zealand's greatest working class leaders. His greatness was to be found in his intransigent defence of workers' interests, despite all hardship and persecution, and his steadfast loyalty to those he represented.

For this he was also one of the most loved and respected people in the country. He was a true leader to the wharfies of Auckland who stood shoulder to shoulder with him through the five cruel months of the 1951 waterfront lockout and who never once turned on him for the sacrifices that they all endured. He was an inspiration to the thousands of freezing workers, drivers, railway workers, and coal miners who took action in support of the waterfront workers, knowing that they were part of the same struggle to throw back the vicious Sid Holland Tory Government. Many of these same workers and still more of their children and grandchildren packed out his funeral service and the union tribute that was organised on the following day by his old friend Frank Barnard, past secretary of the Auckland Freezing Workers Union. Last but not least, he was loved by his extended family of grandchildren and great grandchildren whose pictures covered the walls of his tiny Ellerslie flat.

Jock was also one of New Zealand's most loathed people. His haters included the shipowners, the military brass, the stay at home heroes, the mayor of Auckland and Sid Holland's National Government, stuffed as it was with farmers, businessmen and lawyers. It was on their behalf that the newspaper editors of the time poured waves of abuse and slander on Jock in an attempt to isolate and break him.

But by far the greatest hatred came from those supposedly on "the same side", the side of the workers. These included Peter Fraser, Paddy Webb, and Bob Semple of the Labour Party and F.P. Walsh, Angus McLagan, Alexander Croskery, and Ken McLean of the Federation of Labour. These

Jock Barnes

17 July 1907 - 31 May 2000



Jock Barnes at an anti conscription rally, 1949

people hated Jock because, unlike them, he had maintained his principles and had not betrayed the workers' cause. He had not taken the soft option of a parliamentary career or some plum job under the Labour Government of 1935-49. He had not followed all the other time serving union seat warmers standing in line before the

Arbitration Court to gratefully receive a few pennies on the workers' wage while taking backhanders in pounds from the bosses. Instead, by his words and his actions he demonstrated to all New Zealand workers that the leaders of the Federation of Labour and the Fraser Government were pompous hypocrites who mouthed their sympathy for the workers' cause but who were as vicious as the Tories in attacking militant trade unionists and campaigners against Cold War military jingoism.

Lenin once said that the ruling class make heroes of their bitterest opponents on their deaths once their bodies are cold in their graves. No such fate awaits Jock, whose legacy even today is enough to unleash the bitterest denunciation from all those who would gladly have hanged him in 1951. Former Lange Government Minister, Michael Bassett, was given space in *The Dominion* for a filthy hatchet job. The editorial writers of the same paper

followed this up with an attack which described him as a "domineering bully". Jock and his family can take attacks from these parasites as a vindication of his life as powerful as the plaudits that have rained on him since his death.

The owners of *The Dominion* understand that far from marking "the passing of an age of trade unionism", Jock's death has reminded New Zealand unionists what great things can be achieved by steadfast activism and militancy and resolute determination fight for workers' rights.

Jock lived his final years in modest circumstances in a small flat with little in the way of creature comforts, but with in his mana and number of friends one of the richest people in the land. New Zealand socialists and trade unionists are the poorer for his passing. ■

Tom Bramble

(Tom Bramble was the editor of Jock Barnes' memoirs, *Never a white flag*, published in 1998 by Victoria University Press.)

Tony Cliff, one of the most important revolutionary Marxists of the twentieth century, died in London on April 9, aged 82.

Cliff, who founded and led Britain's Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), probably the largest revolutionary organisation in the world today, also developed the theory of state capitalism, which helped enormously in understanding what had gone wrong in the Soviet Union.

He was born Ygael Gluckstein in the year of the Russian revolution, 1917. His family were relatively prosperous Jews living in what was then British occupied Palestine, present day Israel. From a very early age, the young Cliff became acutely aware and angry about the gross inequalities he saw all around him – between Jews and Arabs – and between different classes within both communities.

At about 16 he joined the local Communist Party, which was staunchly pro Moscow and Stalinist, but soon left to join a tiny Trotskyist group, which he spent the next few years trying to build. But apart from recruiting the editor of the Communist Party's newspaper to his group, Cliff had little success in building in Palestine.

Shortly after the end of World War Two, with the political climate becoming increasingly dangerous to work in, he moved to Britain, adopting his new name and promptly being deported to the Irish Republic, where he spent five miserable years in poverty before finally being allowed to settle in Britain.

One of Cliff's reasons for coming to Britain had been to write a book vindicating Trotsky's theory that the Soviet Union was a "deformed workers' state" and that the Second World War would end in the same way as the First – with economic chaos and revolutionary upheavals. This was the politics of so-called "orthodox Trotskyism." But as he researched his book, Cliff came to reject key aspects of Trotsky's ideas.

Trotsky (who was assassinated in 1940) believed that the Soviet Union was still "partly socialist", a "deformed" or "degenerated"

Tony Cliff

20 May 1917 – 9 April 2000

workers' state, because the economy remained under state control and this represented a lasting gain from the revolution.

Cliff however, showed that it isn't whether the state controls the economy or not that matters, but what form the state itself takes. You either have workers' power or you do not. In Russia, workers were denied the most elementary rights to organise in free trade unions or express political opinions. How the hell could this be "socialism" of any kind?

True, the economy remained nationalised, but in the post war period economic planning and nationalisation (state control of industry) had gained widespread acceptance in both East and West anyway. In reality, although there was little if any internal competition between economic units within the Soviet Union, the Soviet economy as a whole competed with other countries as part of the world capitalist system.

Capitalism by any other name is *still* capitalism.

Further, Marx had always argued that only the working class could make socialism – it couldn't be imposed from above. How then, could the East European "socialist" states, founded and propped up at the point of Red Army guns, be socialist in any

way?

The main Trotskyist organisation in Britain, the relatively large Revolutionary Communist Party, had collapsed into at least three different splinter groups after the war over just these questions. In the late 1940s, Cliff became the leader of one of these, the current that would become the International Socialists (IS) and eventually the SWP.

Sooner or later the politics of orthodox Trotskyism would completely disorientate the other currents. Some would degenerate into a sort of semi-religious sect, retreating into a fantasy world where imaginary armies of proletarians stood permanently on the verge of insurrection. Others, somewhat more politically healthy, still tied themselves in knots over "critical" support for the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, etc.

Only the IS/SWP completely rejected the idea that the *state capitalist* dictatorships had anything to do with real socialism, and of the numerous Trotskyist groups in Britain, only they emerged unharmed from the East European revolutions of 1989.

Cliff was an eccentric but very likeable person, genuinely respected by party members. He had a rare gift for explaining complex ideas in a straightforward everyday language, delivered in a thick Middle Eastern accent peppered with his own inimitable expressions.

One comrade remembers the first IS meeting he attended, where Cliff criticised members for not working hard enough. "The comrades have got to pull their socks!" he kept saying.

He could also cut through the crap to get to the real political point. When a comrade raised objections to the slogans chanted by protesters on the huge anti-Vietnam War Grosvenor Square demonstration in March 1968, Cliff responded, "If 5,000 people storm the American Embassy, who cares what they're chanting!"

Cliff did something very important during this time (the late 1940s to late '60s). Like Trotsky in the 1930s, alone amongst the survivors of 1917

keeping alive the spirit of genuine socialism from below; so too Cliff during a period when most believed that workers had become too prosperous to be interested in revolution, or at least had illusions of some sort in the Soviet style dictatorships, kept alive the idea that socialism could only be built by workers' themselves, and most importantly, that in order to fight for a democratic society you *must* have a democratic workers' organisation.

Unfortunately and to a steadily increasing degree, Cliff's organisation, the British IS (renamed the SWP in 1977) failed to live up to this last principle.

In the early 1990s, the SWP did in fact grow substantially through work in antifascist and other campaigns. But at the same time it adopted its disastrous "1930s in slow motion" perspective, with Cliff arguing that the '90s would see 1968 style revolutionary upheavals and major growth in party membership. By now the democracy of the group had degenerated to the point where its leaders were not only riding roughshod over their own members, but acting as a central committee for

tendency had collapsed or suffered devastating faction fights as Cliff and the other SWP leaders attempted to operate the overseas groups as offshore branches of the SWP.

Should we in New Zealand care about any of this?

Absolutely. Today, our own organisation, the NZ International Socialists, is trying to do what Cliff and the other early leaders of the IS did – to build a radically democratic socialist organisation based on the best traditions of the great Marxists – during a period of prolonged capitalist crisis. So how do we ensure that we avoid going along the same path as so many other small socialist groups, into becoming just another sect?

Firstly, we must recognise that the political degeneration of Cliff's organisation does not reflect some kind of "original sin" of socialist politics. Rather, it is the all too common outcome when small revolutionary groups, lacking working class roots and the ability to properly grasp the level of workers' consciousness at any given time, misread the political climate and try to substitute themselves for what they

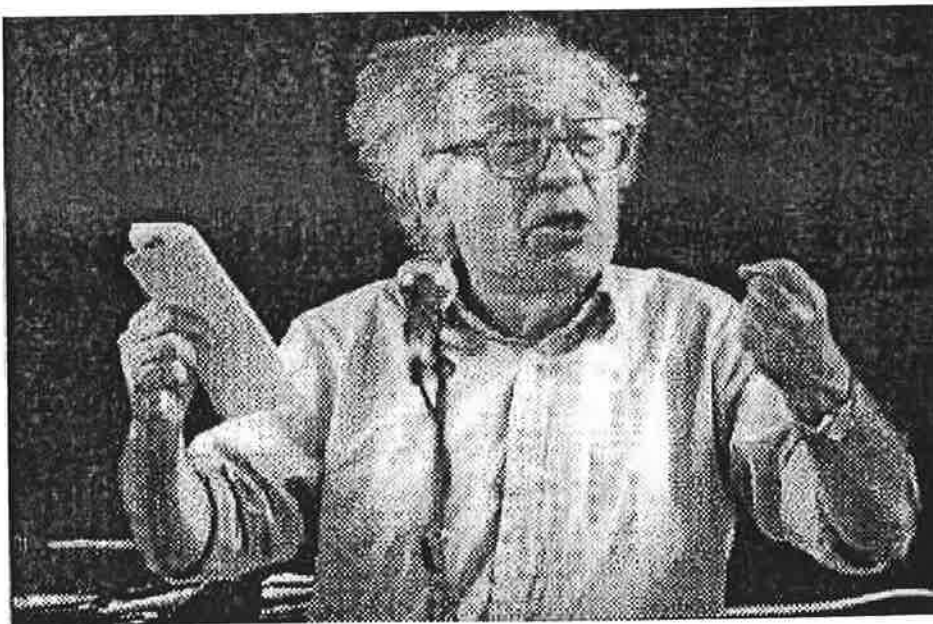
controlling and reigning in our leaders if they act undemocratically or fail to take our opinions into account, by keeping a realistic outlook on the world and what we can hope to achieve at any one time, and by maintaining organisational structures which help to achieve these things.

For us, democracy is not just important, it is the only thing that really matters.

Lenin, as Cliff shows so well in the following article, believed that the members of socialist organisations had a responsibility to correct the mistakes of their leaders – and to replace them if necessary. Cliff's analyses were so sharp, so relevant – yet his performance as a political leader often left much to be desired. As one dissident member put it so well, he often found himself "defending Cliff's politics against Cliff's policies."

The Cliff who deserves to be remembered is a man who above and despite all else kept alive the spirit of revolutionary socialism from below, and without whom this publication or the organisation that produces it would not exist. ■

Andrew Cooper



the sizeable collection of socialist organisations around the world who had based their politics on those of the SWP (the so-called "IS tendency" of socialist groups in about two dozen countries).

By the end of the decade, far from the predicted mass growth and revolutionary upheavals confidently predicted, many of the groups in the

regard as the militancy workers are about to – or at least should be – adopting.

Having a flawed analysis of the political nature of a particular period needn't necessarily be a group's death sentence so long as it maintains thoroughgoing democracy – and honesty – with itself and its wider supporters. We do this by rigorously

Lenin:

a revolutionary for our time

reprinted article by Tony Cliff

Lenin. Turned into a peep show and a god by Stalin and the gravediggers of the Russian revolution. Painted as a tyrant and dictator in the West by the capitalist opponents of socialism.

He was neither of these parodies. He dedicated his life to the emancipation of working people, not only in Russia but throughout the world. He fought to build a tough party of revolutionaries to help organise the working class struggle to overthrow capitalism and establish democratic socialism. Above all, Lenin placed his belief in the ability of working people to throw off the chains of their oppressors.

In this classic article, Tony Cliff, who died recently and whose obituary appears on the previous 2 pages, shows that, despite the lies of rulers in the former Soviet Union and the West, Lenin's ideas remain essential for socialists today.

On the 21st of January 1924 the great revolutionary socialist leader Vladimir Ilyich Lenin died.

Ever since Stalinist leaders in the East and opponents of socialism in the West have done their best to distort the real historical role that he played. The legend was cultivated over a long period that Lenin was the father of Stalinism, a man who believed in totalitarian dictatorship.

What happened to Lenin was prophetically foretold by him in his brilliant work, *State and revolution*, when he described the fate of revolutionary leaders in the past.

"During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonise them, so to say... while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarising it."

Above all, Lenin had supreme confidence in the creative abilities of the masses. Thus, for instance, he wrote in June-July 1905, "Revolutions are festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other time are the mass of the people in a position to come forward so actively as the creators of a new social order, as at a time of

revolution. At such times the people are capable of performing miracles, if judged by the limited, Philistine yardsticks of gradualist progress."

Workers learn in the struggle. They learn from their own experience in battle. The role of a really consistent socialist workers' party is not to lecture to the workers but to learn from the workers in struggle and teach them in struggle.

"The real education of the masses can never be separated from their independent political, and especially revolutionary, struggle. Only struggle educates the exploited class. Only struggle



Lenin addressing a rally in Red Square, Moscow. Trotsky is standing at the right of the podium

discloses to it the magnitude of its own power, widens its own horizon, enhances its abilities, clarifies its mind, forges its will."

The aim of the revolutionary socialist party is to tap the natural potential resources of energy and ingenuity hidden in the masses. The party has to learn from the workers in struggle. "There is an enormous amount of organising talent among the 'people', that is, among the workers and the peasants who do not exploit the labour of others. Capital crushed these talented people in thousands; it killed their talent and threw them onto the scrapheap."

To learn from the masses the party must also be able and ready to learn from its own mistakes, to be very self critical. As Lenin put it, "a political party's attitude towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it fulfils in practice its obligations towards its class, and the working people. Finally acknowledging a mistake, ascertaining the reason for it, analysing the conditions that have led up to it, and thrashing out the means of its rectification – that is the hallmark of a serious party; that is how it should perform its duties, and how it should educate and train its class, and then the masses."

Of course, inner party discussions must not lead to a lack of discipline and unity of action. But on the contrary, inner party democracy has to serve as a base for unity in action. As Lenin so well put it, "We have more than once already enunciated our theoretical views on the importance of discipline and on how this concept is to be understood in the party of the working class. We define it as thus: *unity of action, freedom of discussion and criticism*. Only such discipline is worthy of the democratic party of the working class."

Contrary to Stalinist mythology – as well as that of liberal opponents of Bolshevism – the Bolshevik Party under Lenin's leadership was never a monolithic or totalitarian party. Far from it.

Internal democracy had always been of the utmost importance to party life. Thus for instance, when the most important question of all, the question of the October insurrection in 1917 was the order of the day, the leadership was sharply divided. A strong faction led by Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov, Piatakov, Miliutin and Nogin, opposed the uprising.

After taking power, the differences in the party leadership continued to be as sharp as before. On a number of crucial questions Lenin at times

found himself in a minority, for example, on the elections to the Constituent Assembly in December 1917 and peace negotiations with Germany at Brest-Litovsk. During these periods he acted in accord with the decisions of the majority, while at the same time using every opportunity to argue for a change in policy within the leading bodies of the party.

As a result of the weakness of the Russian working class, after nearly seven years of war and civil war, the isolation of the Russian revolution following the betrayal of the German revolution by right wing labour leaders – including the murder of the great socialist leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht – the Stalinist bureaucracy rose in Russia.

It consolidated itself after the mass murder of Lenin's old comrades-in-arms during the 1930s. One-man management in the factories where managers earned a hundred times more than workers, where workers had no right to strike and were deprived of all freedoms, became the hallmark of the Stalinist regime.

But the future belongs to the ideas of Marx and Lenin:

That the working class is the agent of socialism.

That the working class needs a vanguard party to lead it, to raise its combative ability, consciousness and organisation.

The need to smash the bureaucratic militarist police state machine of capitalism and replace it with democratic workers' councils, where all officials get the same wage as the workers they represent, with regular elections of all officials and the right to recall them.

These ideas are of vital importance to workers everywhere, whether in Britain or Russia, the United States, China or India (or New Zealand).

The future belongs to the ideas of Marx and Lenin. ■

just what **are** your politics anyway?

The more observant, among you may have noticed that this magazine's politics aren't quite the same as the mainstream media's. So just where do we stand? Below are some of the basic political ideas behind our magazine.

Socialism Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need.

Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over its production or distribution. A new society can only be built when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and create a new state in which they will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

Workers Power Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want.

Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power – a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils.

China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have nothing to do with socialism. They are repressive state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers against every ruling class.

Revolution Not Reformism Despite the claims of Labour, Alliance and trade union leaders, the structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class.

They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers.

There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

Internationalism Workers in every country are exploited by capitalism, so the struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We oppose everything that divides workers of different countries. We oppose all immigration controls.

We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles.

Liberation From Oppression We fight for democratic rights. We are opposed to the oppression of women, Maori, Pacific Islanders, gays and lesbians. These forms of oppression are used to divide the working class.

We support the right of all oppressed groups to organise for their own defence.

All these forms of liberation are essential to socialism and impossible without it.

Tino Rangatiratanga We support the struggle for tino rangatiratanga.

Maori capitalists and politicians have no interest in achieving tino rangatiratanga for working class Maori.

The Government and corporate warriors' approach to Treaty claims has benefited a Maori elite while doing little for working class Maori.

Tino rangatiratanga cannot be achieved within capitalism. It will only become a reality with the establishment of a workers' state and socialist society.

Revolutionary Organisation To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by day to day activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

We are beginning to build such a party, linking the ideas of revolutionary socialism to workers' struggles against the system. If you agree with our ideas and want to fight for socialism, we urge you to join us.

check out our new website - for meeting details, online articles, cool links & more, point your web browser at:

www.isonz.homestead.com



We are producing a series of pamphlets providing Marxist analyses of key political questions in Aotearoa/ New Zealand

The first of these is by Evan Poata-Smith, "The struggle for tino rangatiratanga and socialism in Aotearoa"

It can be purchased for \$3 by writing to P O Box 6157, Dunedin North, NZ

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***Socialist*^{\$1} Review**

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crisis, unemployment,
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